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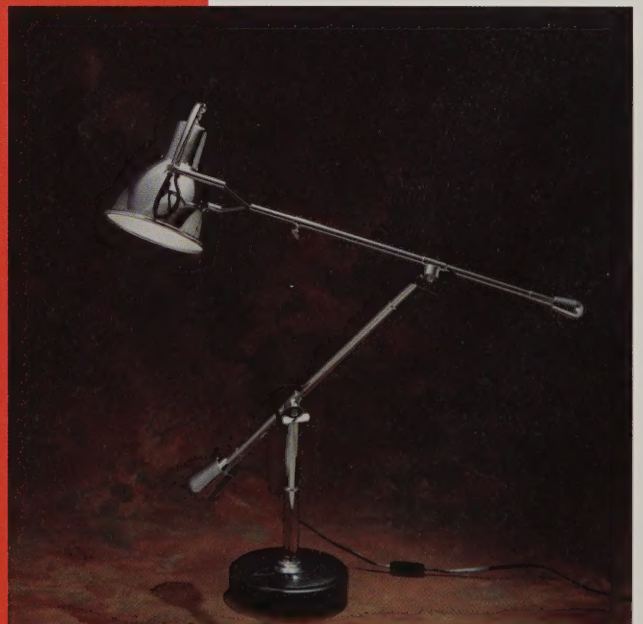
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**Boston is about to embark** on a predictable course. With the recent release of the plan for the Seaport District, property owners, developers, residents, politicians, advocacy groups, institutions, and businesses will settle down to the serious task of evaluating the proposal, each asking that most fundamental question: "What's in it for me?" Along the way, there will be squabbles and skirmishes punctuated by flashes of brilliant creativity and political dexterity. Accommodations and compromises will be made—some contributing to the greater success of the plan, others enduring as monuments to individual ego and sheer bullheadedness. We've done this before.

But if this plan is to result in a district that is truly special, one that both reflects and nurtures its maritime traditions, we can't afford to forget the larger social, cultural, and economic meaning of the waterfront. The current proposal represents state-of-the-art city planning, demonstrating the sophisticated understanding of cities that has evolved in the post-war era. Waterfront planning as we think of it today, however, is relatively new, a response to the decline of many traditional water-dependent industries in the last few decades. The task of ensuring that the Seaport is indeed special will be entrusted to the hundreds—eventually thousands—of architects who will establish the character of this district through a series of cumulative design decisions, both large and small. A superficial response will result in either suburban blandness or nautical silliness.

With this issue of *ArchitectureBoston*, we hope to remind Bostonians of a broader context in which to evaluate the Seaport plan. But we also hope to stimulate new thinking about waterfront planning and design—in all coastal communities. What is an appropriate architecture for the water's edge? How can public interests coexist with private rights? How can we protect vulnerable maritime industries? What uses should we allow? How can our buildings contribute to a healthy waterfront economy? Indeed, the relationship between economic development and architecture is remarkably understudied, treated more like a clandestine affair than a partnership. But architectural innovation—leading at times to the invention of entirely new building types—has already proved to be a rich fuel for waterfront economies.

As the coastal communities of New England struggle to retain their heritage and claim their future, all of us in the building community must acknowledge that we are capable of irrevocable harm to these special places. But with due deliberation, care, and creativity, we can also restore their strength and ensure their continuing vitality.

Elizabeth S. Padjen FAIA  
Editor

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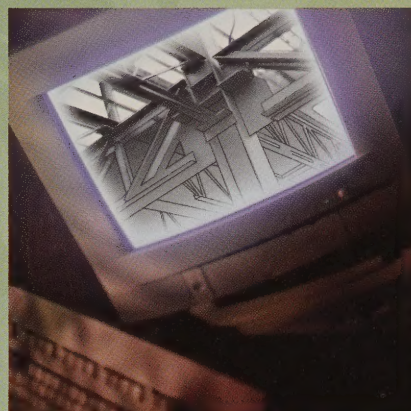
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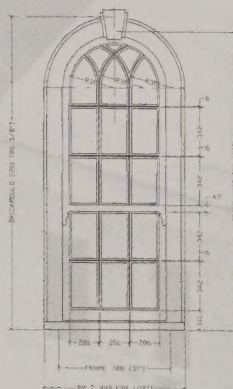
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Spring 1999: Waterfronts  
Volume 2: Number 1



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is published quarterly  
by the Boston Society  
of Architects/AIA.  
Editorial offices:  
52 Broad Street  
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Tel: 617-951-1433  
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ISSN 1099-6346  
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# Letters

I READ WITH GREAT DISTRESS the article "Lions and Tigers and Stairs, Oh My!" by John Stilgoe (*Society* issue 1998) in which he places the primary blame for what he terms the slothful American on the passage of the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA). The ADA is now eight years old, and I do recall that there were a substantial number of overweight individuals before its passage. That shoppers drive from one end of a shopping center to another rather than walk has nothing to do with the ADA.

Stilgoe also blames the uniformity and "eerie sameness" in much recent architecture on the ADA, rather than on bad architects and unenlightened developers. It is not surprising that many architects cannot cope with the ADA. Many architecture schools do not emphasize and sometimes even intentionally ignore access codes, seeing them as restrictions that may stifle the creativity of architecture students.

Stilgoe's question—"What converted a flight of stairs into a barrier?"—is startling. The real question is: When were stairs not a barrier? Stairs have been historically used by architects and builders to separate the elite from the peasantry; the oversized steps at the Acropolis were not an accident. A flight of stairs has always been, and still is, a barrier to anyone with a mobility impairment. Although society is much more accessible than a decade ago, Stilgoe clearly has no idea just how much of a challenge the built environment still poses for someone with a disability. It is highly probable that at some point in his life he will himself need the accessibility provided by the ADA.

The real roots of the problem go back many decades, long before passage of any access requirements. Could we have been led to this point by suburban sprawl and anti-pedestrian design which mandates that individuals drive everywhere? I think so. Are urban dwellers who tend to walk much more fit than their suburban counterparts? Again, I would think so. The overall issues of how we design and build our society make a greater contribution to our destructive lifestyles than the access laws. The real answer is for architects to design communities, buildings, and environments that encourage and inspire users to challenge themselves, and for architectural educators to prepare the future generation of architects to be able to create an exciting and accessible built environment.

Stephen M. Spinetto  
Commissioner  
Commission for Persons with Disabilities  
Boston ■■■



IN RESPONSE TO YOUR EDITORIAL QUESTION —“Have we moved from our perception of architecture as fine art to the perception of architecture as social art?”— the answer must alas be, “No.” We need look no further than your roundtable discussion (*Design* issue 1998) on the two Boston courthouses for proof.

The federal courthouse on Fan Pier and the state courthouse on New Chardon Street are the latest manifestations of an industry in which the United States has come to excel internationally: the incarceration of an underclass. As we know, “justice facilities” in this country have represented a major growth area in construction over the last several years. The United States now has approximately 1.8 million people in jail, more than any other country in the world.

While Massachusetts has the fourth lowest incarceration rate in the nation, even this relatively benign statistic conceals a more sinister profile. Our rate of incarceration of blacks is nine times that of the general population. A recent *Boston Globe* article indicates that males convicted of drug offenses and living in areas of extreme poverty are 19 times more likely to be incarcerated than males convicted of drug offenses in non-poverty areas. One in six minority men will be imprisoned before the age of 40. Among whites in non-poverty areas, the projected rate is only one in 100.

There is sufficient indication that the justice system in this country—and in this Commonwealth—is visiting upon the poor and dispossessed the most grievous and chronic injustice on a daily basis. The urbanity of these new law courts conceals a program quite at variance with the high-mindedness of American jurisprudence and of your discussants.

This knowledge would not necessarily change the design, but it is within this context that any discussion of the design of law courts must be couched. For us to ignore these facts reduces us to the level of mere functionaries compromised, in Hannah Arendt’s prescient phrase, with the “banality of evil.” To review Behrens’ magnificent AEG factory in Berlin outside of the context of German pre-war industrialization would be to miss at least part of the point. To critique Albert Speer’s plan for Berlin without reference to his client’s program would be more than remiss. To discuss the proportions and jointing techniques of the crucifix without reference to its purpose would indeed be a blasphemy. I leave your readers to ponder where within this field of social art we should place the design of the law courts in view of the injustice they accommodate.

Hubert Murray AIA  
Cambridge, Massachusetts ■■■■

IN “UNWANTED, UNLOVED,” (*Design* issue 1998) Henry Moss urges us to preserve the Hurley Building, home of the Lindemann Center, saying, “An assault on this building cannot be far off.”

He’s right. I hope to lead that assault.

The Hurley Building fails on the counts Moss himself presents as standards for preservation. No important historical event is associated with the building. It represents no culture that I’m aware of or would want to encourage. Its architect is a name, but whether or not he had talent may be disputed.

As an object it fails. It is ugly, and beauty matters to those of us who live in its close proximity. Its squat bulk looms like a prison. Its materials lack elegance and weather poorly. The building doesn’t work. Once inside, one can’t easily find one’s way around. The offices are grim.

Moreover, it degrades our neighborhood’s otherwise successful urban environment. People recoil from the Hurley Building. Pedestrians cross Staniford Street so they can walk along Charles River Park instead. When confronted with the Hurley, even that banal complex is preferable.

There are elegant modern buildings, such as the delicious vault-like Federal Reserve Bank or the John Hancock building, with its reflective surfaces and surprising geometry, that are worth preserving. But we shouldn’t slavishly preserve all Modernist buildings. The ones that degrade our quality of life should meet the wrecker’s ball.

Karen Cord Taylor  
Editor and Publisher, *The Beacon Hill Times*  
Boston ■■■■

I COULDN’T AGREE MORE with Henry Moss about the need to protect 20th-century architecture. I must strenuously take issue, however, with his inclusion of the State Health Education and Welfare building [Lindemann Center]. Was Paul Rudolph an extraordinary Modernist? Absolutely. Did he build many spectacular buildings? No question. Was the Lindemann Center one of them? Never in a million years. That dingy pile of concrete is an impenetrable, aggressive fortress—maybe one of the most unfriendly in all of Boston.

An inveterate Rudolph apologist might argue that he did the best he could with his site and program, but any self-respecting urbanist would have designed it differently or turned down the commission altogether. Modern buildings had an obligation to contribute to the life of their cities (although many didn’t), and many have been successful. But Lindemann just doesn’t cut the mustard.

Homer Russell  
Boston ■■■■

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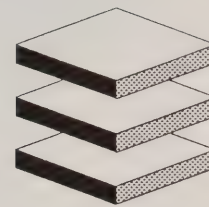


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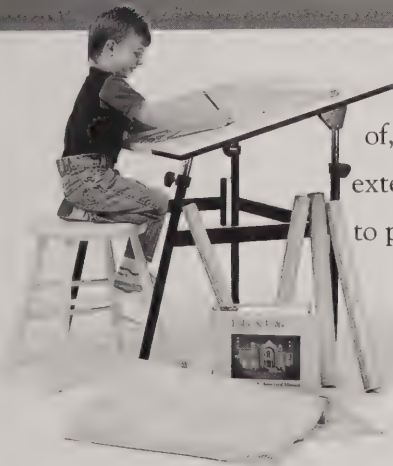


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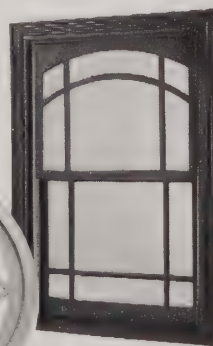


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# Port Authorities

## The future of Massachusetts' other port cities

### Roundtable Discussion

Public attention has recently focused on plans for Boston's 1,000-acre Seaport District. Few people realize that Massachusetts' other major port cities—Gloucester, Salem, Fall River, and New Bedford—are also preparing waterfront plans. In many ways, these communities are microcosms of Boston, facing many similar issues. The harbors of these cities are tied to hundreds of years of maritime tradition, and their masterplans have the potential to affect the economic and social wellbeing of entire municipalities. Perhaps even more than the Seaport District, these ports may be the genesis of truly innovative waterfront design and planning.

### Participants

**Steven Cecil AIA** is a principal of The Cecil Group in Boston, which is preparing harbor masterplans for Fall River and Salem.

**Dennis Ducsik** is the tidelands policy coordinator for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Coastal Zone Management Office.

**Dennis Frenchman** is the director of the Design and Development Group of the MIT School of Architecture and Planning. He is a principal of Icon Architecture, Inc. in Boston, which is preparing the harbor masterplan for Gloucester and programmed the harbor planning efforts in Salem, Fall River, and New Bedford.

**Annie Harris** is the executive director of The Salem Partnership.

**Alex Krieger FAIA** is chairman of the Department of Urban Planning and Design at the Harvard Graduate School of Design. He is a principal of Chan Krieger & Associates in Cambridge, MA, which is preparing a masterplan for Massport property in Boston's Seaport District.

**Frank Mahady** is a principal of FXM Associates in Mattapoisett, MA, economic development consultants to New Bedford, Gloucester, and Salem.

**Elizabeth Padjen FAIA** is the editor of *Architecture Boston*.

**Antone (Tony) Souza** is executive director of the Waterfront Historic Area League of New Bedford (WHALE) and chairs the New Bedford Harbor Planning Committee.

**Jack Wiggin** is the assistant director of the Urban Harbors Institute of the University of Massachusetts/Boston and is working on masterplans for Salem and Fall River.



**Padjen** Waterfront planning and design, as we talk about it now, is relatively new—something that has evolved since the 1970s. What has changed in the last 25 or 30 years in terms of the way we're thinking about waterfronts?

**Frenchman** Well, for one, many of these masterplans would not be underway, because in the late '70s, a lot of these ports were still productive industrial ports. Now we're trying to cope with the transition of these parts of the city from industrial and maritime uses to other types of activities. Whether these new activities supplant or accommodate the traditional uses is the focus of much of the discussion.

**Krieger** Planning was historically an essential role of most waterfront cities. What we mean today is a very special kind of adaptive reuse. One might say that today we are engaged in urban design on the waterfront as opposed to waterfront planning.

**Souza** In the late '70s, waterfront planning was not integrated with planning for the rest of the city. That's the biggest change in the last 20 years.

**Wiggin** The waterfront revitalization trend probably started 40 years ago with the post-industrial transition. And now I think it's reflective of the new kinds of service economies that are taking over what had previously been industrial cities.

**Mahady** There's been a "sea change" in the way people look at waterfronts, certainly in the last 30 years and maybe going back as far as World War II. In the past, the waterfront was where you tossed the garbage. Now you see

places like Nantucket with the transformation of the waterfront to the "highest and best use," which is extraordinarily expensive retail shops. This is all coming as people value being on the water more.

**Harris** And as people see more value in it, they think they have a say in it. So there's a lot more regulation, especially environmental regulation, and you see a lot of people participating who formerly weren't so interested. It's no longer just the immediate users of the waterfront. The process has become much more complicated.







**Krieger** One reason for that change is that the waterfront is no longer considered a workplace. On a Saturday morning, you don't think about going to your factory to hang out and have a good time, and so in the 1920s, you wouldn't think of spending your Saturdays or Sundays at the waterfront because that was where you spent Mondays through Fridays as, say, a longshoreman.

**Ducsik** I don't think it's true that waterfronts are no longer a place to work. Part of what's going on with waterfront planning arises from the fact that a number of communities want to reinvent themselves as workplaces, but they feel that there still is a value to the community in maintaining a workable port economy. It's industrial renewal. We throw the word "industrial" around as if it's a dirty word, literally as well as figuratively. And I don't think that's true. All these communities are trying to figure out how the new and the old can coexist.

**Padjen** As you oversee all these plans, do you see differences in the communities and the way they react to these issues? Are there differing values?

**Ducsik** No question. We have the full spectrum, from those communities that consider maintaining and enhancing their port economy to be the most important goal, to communities that feel that they never were or will be a viable port and therefore want to focus on making the most out of their waterfront resources for recreation and urban activation. And there are communities in between.

**Wiggin** I'd put New Bedford at one end of the spectrum. It sees the port economy as what the community has always been about, and what it always should be about, though not to the exclusion of tourism. There are major cultural resources in New Bedford that can be the basis for an active tourism component, and I think they're pursuing that in a very sensible way. I would put Gloucester at that end of the spectrum, too. Gloucester has a very strong interest in preserving the traditional, authentic kind of small-pier development that has made them famous as a port—and attractive to tourism. At the other end of the spectrum is Fall River, which is a community that feels that

there's a higher and better use for the waterfront areas that have traditionally been industrial in nature. And I think Salem is pretty much in between. Salem's a special case. The working industrial port area is not a dominant feature on the waterfront, and I think the tensions are far less acute.

**Cecil** Gloucester and New Bedford are fishing ports, and what goes on in those ports is very much a part of the culture of the community. On the other hand, the port areas in Fall River don't define the city, and people don't feel particularly close to them.

**Frenchman** We tend to think that because ports are all on the water, they must have similar issues. It's really not the case, especially if you look at the geography. Fall River, with its vast spaces and river frontage, is vastly different from Gloucester, where you have a small-scale, intimate harbor that has been the cultural heart of its community for 375 years.

**Cecil** One of the things that these ports do share is the fact that the private-sector economics on waterfronts don't work very well. Fundamental aspects of the local economy can get priced out by the private sector very quickly. Lobster boats, for example, may be very picturesque and help to attract tourists, but lobster boats can't pay the rent as well as yachts can, or even a restaurant on the pier. So the private-sector economics go against the public interest. And in older waterfronts, you have other issues when the industrial use goes away: We're left with environmental problems, with rotting infrastructure, and with buildings that are virtually impossible to reuse on a cost-effective basis. Unless we take positive public action, we'll still be having many of these same debates in 2010.





**Mahady** There's a dichotomy in the value of individual waterfront parcels—the highest and best use of one parcel for real estate, which might be a hotel, and the use of that same parcel as an economic transition zone. For example, there's a little pier in Onset in Wareham, where an excursion boat runs. It draws about 40,000 visitors to Onset. That's the equivalent of a 150-room hotel in terms of visitation, and it requires nothing in the way of buildings or supportive infrastructure. It also preserves open space for public use. We've seen it in the whale-watch in Provincetown, where three whale-watch vessels are generating more economic impact in Massachusetts than the entire cruise ship industry in the North Atlantic, in terms of visitations and spending at local ports. The push-and-pull is over the part of the waterfront that is not occupied by traditional industries. Should it be a transition zone that you can bring boats into, that draws tourists, that could draw water-dependent uses with community-wide economic impact? Or do you maximize the real-estate value of the parcel by bringing in a high-end residential or hotel use?

**Harris** The public needs to play an active role in the waterfront because the whole tendency of the private sector is to close it off for private development. The economic benefits are much greater when the public keeps it open.

**Mahady** And if the public sector doesn't protect and regulate these areas, our waterfront will go the way the Rhode Island waterfront has gone—to condos and hotels. The real value of a designated port area is that it artificially devalues the waterfront parcel so that it can be used as that transition zone.

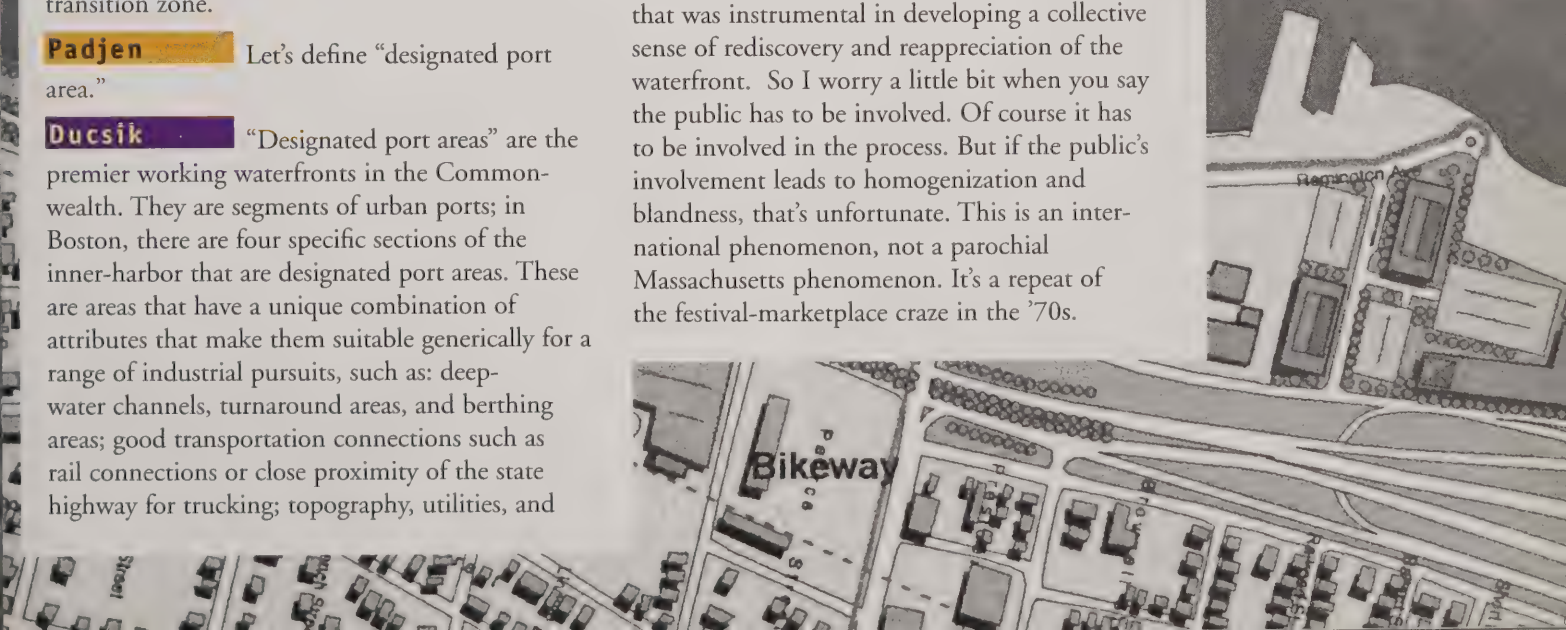
**Padjen** Let's define "designated port area."

**Ducsik** "Designated port areas" are the premier working waterfronts in the Commonwealth. They are segments of urban ports; in Boston, there are four specific sections of the inner-harbor that are designated port areas. These are areas that have a unique combination of attributes that make them suitable generically for a range of industrial pursuits, such as: deep-water channels, turnaround areas, and berthing areas; good transportation connections such as rail connections or close proximity of the state highway for trucking; topography, utilities, and

other landside conditions that can support industrial activity; and finally, an industrial character that still has not gone through any kind of conversion to non-water-dependent, non-industrial uses. Those attributes define a very small part of the Massachusetts coast, and our policy is that these are nonrenewable resources. We should not be driven in our decisions about their use by short-term economic cycles or development opportunities.

**Wiggin** The public obviously has an interest in these waterfront areas. The question is: Who is the public? From the state perspective, it's a regional public interest, and that's what ports typically serve. But that might not be the local public interest. The best example of that is Chelsea Creek, which is lined with petroleum tanks. From the community's point of view, that's not a good use of its waterfront. It looks across the harbor and sees downtown Boston and says, "That's our idea of what a community waterfront should look like." Yet, from a regional point of view, that petroleum distribution is extremely valuable. And that's why we have a state policy.

**Krieger** And yet the state regulations are almost formulaic. I think that the waterfronts should be different from one another—as they have been historically. But we tend to be so emulative of successes that I think there's a risk of limiting our definition of public amenities to brick sidewalks and bollards and a couple of fish restaurants. It may not be popular to point out that a lot of the Boston waterfront was recycled for residential use—a very un-public use, but one that was instrumental in developing a collective sense of rediscovery and reappreciation of the waterfront. So I worry a little bit when you say the public has to be involved. Of course it has to be involved in the process. But if the public's involvement leads to homogenization and blandness, that's unfortunate. This is an international phenomenon, not a parochial Massachusetts phenomenon. It's a repeat of the festival-marketplace craze in the '70s.





**Souza** We're building on our own character in New Bedford. We're not trying to create something that we're not. I agree with Alex—when you try to do that, it usually fails, especially in a small city like New Bedford. We are a seaport. And if tourism plays a role in that, it will be because people are attracted to what we are and not what they think we are.

**Cecil** In contrast, Fall River is trying to develop a waterfront identity that it never had. And in doing that, we're working with the city to define something that will first add fundamentally to the quality of life of the people who are there and, second, to tourism. But one of the things that is a design issue as well as a planning issue is this question of the right image for the waterfront. The Fall River waterfront will have uses that didn't exist previously. It doesn't need to look like a New England village. What's the image that we want to invent? I don't know if we've got a handle on it. I don't think we have good models yet.

**Frenchman** A lot of these choices are proposed as either/or decisions. I think it's one of the fallouts of having a designated port area. It forces you to think about industry *or* tourism. In fact, the most powerful tourism attraction is probably an authentic working port where people are earning a living and things are happening, because this is something we don't find around every waterfront in the country. So in Gloucester, for example, it came as a revelation after six months of planning that the people who wanted so-called "tourism uses" and the people who wanted industrial uses were on the same side of the fence. If we can preserve and enhance the working waterfront, it's going to preserve industrial jobs and attract new activities to the water as well. And I think this approach will result in some new prototypes.

**Souza** "Cultural tourism" is becoming one of the buzz phrases in many cities where they use historic preservation to celebrate something that no longer exists. We do a little bit of that in New Bedford with the Whaling Museum. But when you look at our waterfront, you see an industry that is alive—an active fishing industry.

**Padjen** What by contrast do you do with a city like Salem? Does it become a Williamsburg-by-the-Sea? Is there in fact a waterfront constituency in a place like Salem, where there is no real working port?

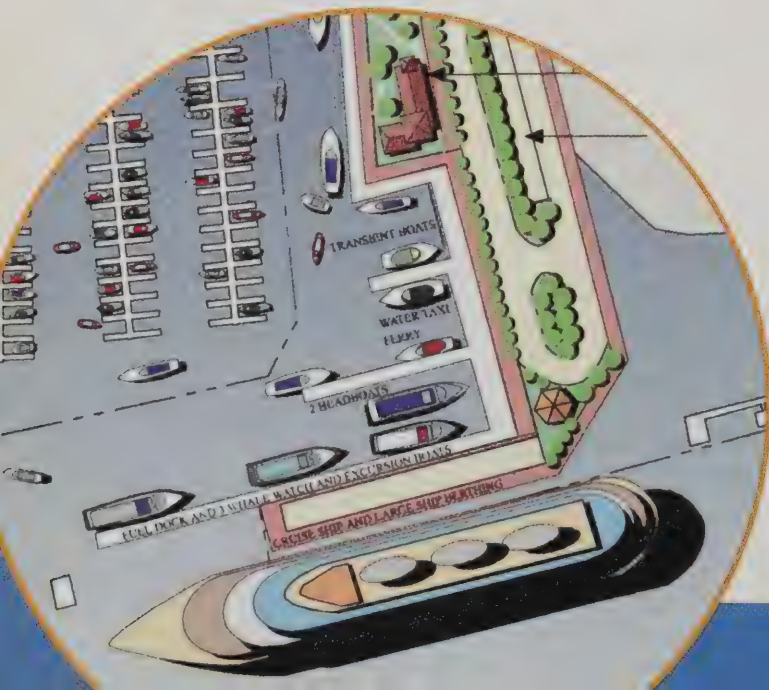
**Harris** Salem has different kinds of issues. Where it has industrial uses on the water, it doesn't have deep-water access—except at the power plant. There's always been a real mismatch. Salem's approach is to look at maximizing water uses. So everything is focused on boats—we're really not looking at the buildings. We've already had some success with the new Salem-to-Boston ferry, but it's very hard. If you maximize what happens on the water, it really affects the landside. If you don't provide parking, for example, the impact on the surrounding neighborhood is phenomenal. And that means you can't build much on the land because you're providing for the cars. But we are making a conscious decision: We really want to maximize the waterside because this is our only opportunity to get to the water.

**Padjen** And how is that actually manifested in the plan?

**Harris** At this point the plan is trying to provide the maximum amount of dock space and pier space that we can get.

**Ducsik** Annie's put her finger on an interesting new issue: planning from the waterside. There's a learning curve going on. We're very comfortable with the concept of connecting development in the waterfront district to the rest of the community. But we don't understand completely what it really means to plan from the waterside, with lots of boats and different kinds of vessel activities.

**Frenchman** There is not a lot of information about what might happen over the next 30 to 40 years on the waterside. We can think in terms of things we've done in the past that will be resurrected, like ferries and commuting and using water taxis. But there are also enormous untapped resources—opportunities to serve research and development of the ocean itself that we are just beginning to see in this country, although you can certainly see these kinds of activities emerging in other countries like Japan. I therefore think it's a good policy to keep some of these areas free from condos and hotels and other uses that gratify the real-estate market, but which don't keep our opportunities open. Once you have people living on the waterfront, you won't get them off in many lifetimes.





**Cecil** In the past, there was a very weak or nonexistent regulatory environmental framework. So if we needed more waterfront, we made it. If we needed more piers, we built them. There was never a problem with shortage in that sense, and it was cost-effective. But now we've made the harborfront a finite commodity, and we're protecting it with public policy decisions and regulations like the Water Quality Act of 1971 and Chapter 91 [the Public Waterfront Act].

**Krieger** I think Chapter 91 is an example of misplaced public-policy planning. It's limited to one specific view. There isn't a strong enough distinction between urban waterfronts and waterfronts in natural areas or in villages and towns.

**Ducsik** It's a widely held yet fallacious idea that Chapter 91 has one particular vision of what's right and what's wrong. There is incredible opportunity for diversity. It's true there are some bright red lines in the regulations, and those bright red lines were very carefully chosen to represent what we thought were overriding objectives in the public interest. The only place where we really attempted to be proactive in controlling uses was in designated port areas on behalf of marine industrial uses.

**Krieger** If Chapter 91 led, say, to the need for 50-foot sidewalks on the south side of Northern Avenue in the South Boston Seaport District, that's bad. You might say that it was bad design or a capitulation or a misreading of the legislation that led to 50 percent open space along Northern Avenue for the Fidelity parcels. But I believe there are certain inflexibilities in Chapter 91.

**Frenchman** One of the motivations for Chapter 91 was the reaction to what the private market was producing on the waterfront. Any state-wide regulation of any kind is going to have its problems when applied to a local circumstance.

**Wiggin** I would echo that. Chapter 91 is the embodiment of some legal rights that the public has in these areas. It also reflects what the public believes is the best policy for the waterfront and that is, simplistically, two things: accessing and activating the waterfront.

**Cecil** I think that we're now in the middle of a very important experiment with the four municipal harbor plans. It's been a very difficult process for everybody so far—we're inventing it as we go. But the key factor, and I'm agreeing with Alex on this, is that it's quirky, small-scale things that can make the waterfront sing. One or two little things that don't meet the rules can make a place really great, and that's what Boston and New England have always been about. It's that quirkiness. We're not Grant Park in Chicago.

**Ducsik** You really have to be involved in the Chapter 91 program on a day-by-day basis to appreciate how much quirkiness it allows. It was designed to address everything from the smallest pier up to the 190-acre Boston Marine Industrial Park. We are constantly challenging the flexibility in the regulations, and we're constantly keeping the bar high to challenge ourselves to make each project better than the last.

**Padjen** It seems that these masterplans are forcing an education upon us all. We're inevitably making mistakes, even now. Does that worry you? Do you have a sense of where we're going?

**Souza** It worries me a lot.

**Cecil** I think the reason these topics are relevant for a magazine called *ArchitectureBoston*, as opposed to *Planning and Urban Design Massachusetts*, is that we're really talking about a significant design challenge. We're inventing an image for a city. We have choices to make, and we've got to get it right because it's critical to the future of these communities—more critical, I would say, to these four communities than it is to Boston.

**Harris** Image really is a key aspect of the local economy. It is a very big issue for these communities. But I agree that we are just at the beginning. If we can figure out what really works, it could change a lot of the cities in Massachusetts that are on rivers and on harbors. We have a huge problem—here in Massachusetts and across the United States—with migration from the cities. Suburban building is gobbling up our open space, and we're leaving these poor cities behind. It's a waste of public money because we have to underpin these cities. At the same time, we're putting public money into building more roads and infrastructure. And it's because people have this notion that there's nothing in the cities—that they're old, they're industrial, they're not attractive. But waterfronts are one of the easiest ways to change people's attitudes.



**Souza** Those are the same people who will get paper bags in the supermarket because they're going to recycle everything. But when it comes to a city, they don't look at it as something that can be recycled.

**Krieger** I believe that the suburban century is near its end. I can't point to any examples, but I believe that in my heart. We're simply bored with it. There are people who are now flocking to the cities to escape the homogeneity of suburbia. At the same time, I think we must understand that some cities may not be sustainable, which means that cities have to be increasingly more competitive. And so, it's perfectly understandable why waterfronts have emerged as an important issue. They are part of the way in which these cities, which have suffered from being displaced by the suburbs, can now fight back.

**Ducsik** As long as we fight against the importation of suburban values into those cities. And that happens on the waterfront. People want to move back to the city, but they still want the sense of retreat and enclave that they enjoyed in the suburbs.

**Frenchman** I agree that the design challenges are immense. It's easy to blame homogeneity on Chapter 91, but there are a hundred other forces that are moving in that direction—against diversity and toward uniformity. Getting that diversity back through building form, the relationship to the water, and types of uses is really a challenge for planners and architects.

**Krieger** One of the great challenges is how to make non-conventional solutions palatable to the public. There is a conservative sentiment that is fearful of diversity and believes that the future will be worse than the past. It's easy to talk about new models. But the public's appetite for new models at the moment is very, very minimal.

**Ducsik** Property owners and developers are part of this, too, because their points of view are very limited.

**Harris** When you work in an area that is highly regulated, with a lot of public process, you go with plain vanilla. Because you know you can sell it. You know you can get the financing for it. So it's up to the design community to help stretch the thinking with specific examples of other ways of doing things.

**Krieger** But designers are largely discredited as voices of enlightenment in our communities. We need citizen advocates who can latch onto good ideas and actually help the design community in that way. I don't think that any designer can walk into a public meeting right now and have his or her way with the crowd. A good idea or new model often goes right down the drain because an expert who seems disconnected from the community is proposing it.

**Mahady** I would say that I'm the last person who would suggest that architects should be more omnipotent. They need to be more subtle and more flexible. But time and time again, we put brilliant numbers on the table, saying, "This is going to work, this is good for you, this is going to create jobs." But if it doesn't have an articulated vision that people can see—whether it's a site plan or a rendering, something that they can relate to on a very basic level—we don't succeed on the economic side, and that means we don't succeed on the public-policy side.

**Frenchman** I'm not willing to let the designers off so easily. I think they need to be more creative and help people to envision what the future waterfront could be. It's not going to be like the '70s. And it's not going to be like the 1890s, either. We need new images.

**Cecil** More than ever before, it is all about image. An inventive image. We cannot rely on the past. One of the things that is important to understand about waterfront design today is that it's not a specialization like airports or hospitals. It's not a building type. It's really city building and it requires an understanding of urbanism. It is something that many architects can contribute to. But if you miss that piece and are looking in the catalogues for nautical-style exterior lights, you've really missed the boat. ■■■



Salem Harbor plan  
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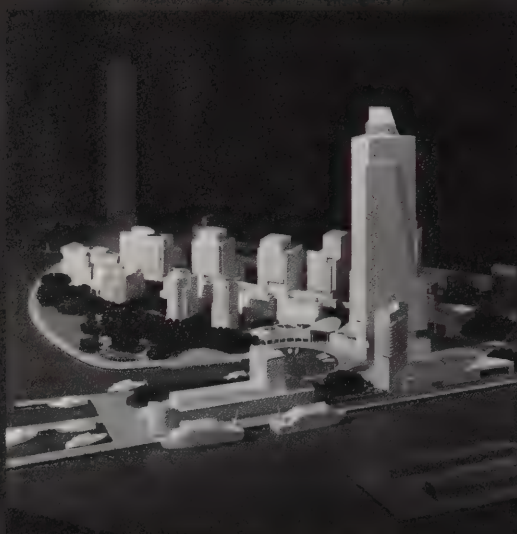
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# Harbor Plan Déjà Vu

by John R. Stilgoe

Reconfigure Atlantic Avenue. Site a new bridge over the Charles. Weld East Boston to the North End. Raze dilapidated wharves and adjacent structures. Link proposed harbor-edge parks to existing playgrounds and beaches. Sort out the street-traffic mess. Dig the North Station-South Station rail tunnel. Build a civic center. Get ready for railroad electrification. Sound familiar? It's all in the *Report of the Commission on Metropolitan Improvements*, a bulky tome filled with maps, plans, and statistics, published in the year 1909.

And here we go again 90 years later. Now we have another turn-of-the-century plan to stagger us. But one thing is clear. Masterplanning a port city proves peculiarly difficult at hinge moments, as the blue-ribbon Commission learned in the first years of this century. Experts evaluate new-born and doddering technologies and know they must integrate them into The Plan, but they realize, too, that the loss of the old sometimes threatens not only public happiness but also real-estate values. Bet-hedging began around the year 1900, when Boston planners struggled with the concept we call "mixed-use," trying to keep alive the visual symbols of Olde Port Boston while addressing high-profile, maddening issues like shipping-channel and railroad belt-line congestion and replacing drawbridges with fixed spans. And maybe their plan reminds us why we care now about the same things so many people cared about a century ago.

When Olmsted designed the South Boston Strandway, he deliberately left an extensive coal-wharf operation inside the pedestrian promenade, arguing that it was a desirable feature, since the presence of shipping picturesquely enhanced the interest of the scene. Soon afterward, the Commission noted darkly, the coal wharf had

to be purchased at great expense and made part of the park—too many promenaders returned begrimed with coal dust. So should the masterplan follow Olmsted's direction, or should it admit that small-scale waterfront businesses—the sort that in 1909 still attracted picturesque schooners from Maine, the sort likely to interfere with recreational use—were destined for oblivion anyway? What did the public want, and what did it want enough to pay for? Mixed use? Efficient use? Or a port city without port-city hassles? It all sounds so intimately familiar to all of us a century later.

In the zero years of the 20th century, Boston and other port cities confronted a fierce public fascination with vanishing ways, particularly the old ways of seafaring symbolized by sailing vessels. While full-rigged ships still evoked clipper-ship glory days, small schooners penetrating far into East Cambridge, East and South Boston, and Dorchester along old canals and shallow estuaries did more to salt everyday urban life in 1900, their masts punctuating the three-decker skyline, reminding everyone that wind and tide still shaped Boston commerce. Canals snaked into Cambridgeport, and rivers such as the canalized Malden carried schooners far inland. As tugboats replaced schooners, lumber and coal traffic moved increasingly by barge up the Charles as far as the Brighton stockyards, but Bostonians walking or riding to work still might find a sailing vessel suddenly dwarfing nearby structures as the U.S.S. *Constitution* does today. Usually appearing overnight like sea-going mushrooms in the urban lawn, the tall ships reminded passersby that every Bostonian owned a piece of seafaring spirit. Everyone loved the sailing vessels as a signature element of Boston identity, and everyone fumed at delays when drawbridges opened to accommodate them, delaying trains, streetcars, even horseless carriages. The commissioners saw only nostalgia in the Bostonian love of the old-style working waterfront.

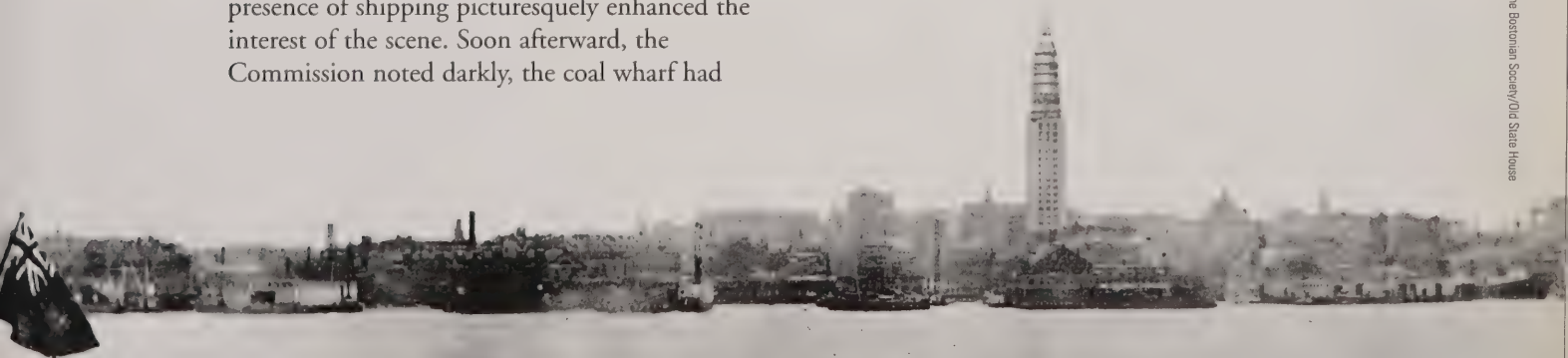


Photo: Courtesy of The Bostonian Society/Old State House



Who could doubt that trains would henceforth dictate urban form? But who could tell the people that ships had no cultural importance? And still they wondered: Might the sea become important again in ways no one imagined?

The 1909 *Report* balances all the positive values of an urban fabric richly seamed with channels, estuaries, and rivers against the appalling problem of traffic congestion. The Commission missed the significance of the Kitty Hawk flying machine event six years earlier, but it grasped the dawning importance of the automobile. Improving access around—not to—the perimeter of Boston Harbor dogged the Commissioners from the beginning, especially since politicians and industrialists focused on linking improved port facilities with hinterland cities like Chicago and Montreal. New crossings of old canals and estuaries would mean embarking on an orgy of bridge-building, both road and rail. Since square-rigged vessels still loaded hardwood lumber in Roxbury before sailing to South America, all nine bridges then crossing Fort Point Channel had movable spans, which cost a fortune to build and maintain and would cost an even greater fortune to replace with fixed high-level spans approached by grades gentle enough to encourage hurrying pedestrians and fast-driving motorists.

What to do? On the one hand, the *Report* urges the eventual filling of South Bay, Roxbury Canal, and Fort Point Channel, since improved rail service (to South America?) would kill off their already declining shipping business. On the other, it urges everyone to look closely at new commuting and residential patterns. Building a North Station-South Station rail tunnel would boost terminal capacity immensely by making both stations far more efficient. But it would do little to move freight cars around the perimeter of Boston Harbor. Either the ocean-liner wharves had to move from East Boston to the wharves near downtown, or else Massachusetts had to build a new harbor tunnel to carry electric trains straight to the glorious steamship facilities the Commission envisioned for the East Boston mudflats where Logan Airport stands today. If the channels were not filled, the whole metropolitan region confronted street and rail gridlock, unless some kind of elevated central artery could be built right through downtown, maybe above Atlantic Avenue.





Buried deep in the *Report* lurks some very far-sighted thinking indeed. With eventual railroad electrification and a massive new port facility, it suggests, the shabby industries lining Fort Point Channel and other canalized estuaries might be bought and demolished. In Malden and in Charlestown, in East Cambridge and in Roxbury, even along the Neponset, private real-estate developers might replicate what had been done along the Charles and along the South Boston Strandway. They might level the tanneries, the unprofitable coal and lumber yards, the slaughterhouses, the hundred other dingy industries, and replace them with fine housing offering occupants little wharves for pleasure boats.

A century later, the *Report* still looms, a monument to paralysis. Even the Commission understood that Bostonians wanted salt water ebbing and flowing far into neighborhoods like Roxbury, that they wanted regular—not occasional—visual reminders that they lived in a seaport, not in a river-front city or a big railroad junction, and that they wanted the opportunity to live adjacent to a clean harbor, one freed of noxious industries. In the ordinary give-and-take of everyday city politics that followed the publication of the *Report*, taxpayers made clear their preference for draw-bridges rather than the high-arching fixed bridges that strained horses, bicyclists, and pedestrians. They understood that whatever new wharves some Port-Authority-to-Be might build, New York would

still reign supreme, and they refused to tax themselves to build a belt-line railroad in the face of nascent automobile and truck technology. And once the Age of Sail became a memory, most of the old channels attracted fill and factories. But the dream of a port city convenient to inland towns and offering immediately accessible industrial, commercial, residential, and recreational waterfronts lingered despite industrial exodus, two world wars, and even the elevated Central Artery. Bostonians wanted to walk to the water. Almost certainly the salt-scented east wind proved a factor, reminding citizens that just a mile or so away lies an archipelago of islands in Boston Harbor and, beyond it, the sea. Boston lies on the edge of ocean wilderness, and its citizens still prize the touch of wildness the sea air brings inland. ■■■

Author of many books, most recently *Outside Lies Magic* and *Alongshore*, John R. Stilgoe is Orchard Professor in the History of Landscape at Harvard University.





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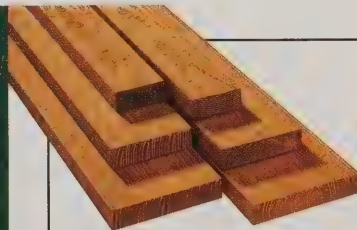


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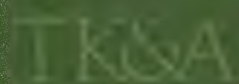
  
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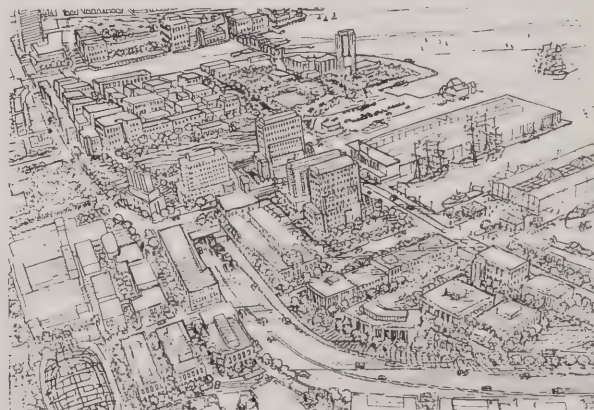


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# Learning from Cheyenne

By John K. Bullard

At the Mayors' Institute on City Design in 1987, I listened to Don Erickson, who was then the mayor of Cheyenne, Wyoming, describe his design problem—how to focus downtown development on the waterfront. It occurred to me that if waterfront development was critical in Cheyenne, then we were not fully appreciating the power of water here in New England nor the value of waterfronts.





An aerial photograph of a harbor, likely New Bedford, showing numerous fishing boats docked along a pier. The boats are of various colors, including white, red, and blue. In the background, a street with cars and a building are visible.

The same thought occurred when I visited the famed San Antonio Riverwalk. This waterfront revitalization had been responsible for hundreds of millions of dollars of private investment that was the cornerstone of San Antonio's downtown rebirth. I couldn't wait to see the power of that water. And when I got there, I saw that the river was 30 feet wide, two feet deep—and green!

If this much water could create so much economic power (and the mighty Jordan River isn't much bigger), then what enormous possibilities exist for New England seaports?

I certainly feel this way about my hometown—New Bedford. If one were forced to reduce this bustling, working-class city of 100,000 diverse souls down to a single word, that word would be *seaport*. In New Bedford, we have always sent our people to sea. And in pursuing a way of life at sea, our people are changed. Facing 30 foot waves, 50 knot winds, and ice forming in the rigging and having to earn a living in those conditions—well, that would change anyone. We are more aware of the power of nature and the fragility of man.





The water, which long ago gave birth to us, still draws us inexorably to its edge. And if we are allowed contact, the water can transform us. Cities, too, were for the most part born at the water's edge, which formed the connection to the rest of the world and the source of urban trade and economy.

**Instead of looking at the water from the land, we need to follow the example of our ancestors and view the city from the sea, the source of the city's purpose and meaning.**

In the 18th and 19th centuries, seaports extended their piers farther and farther into the sea, filling in

behind them as the waterfront advanced, as if trying to get ever closer to the source of economic energy. The last half of the 20th century saw this movement reversed in many seaports. Rivers and seas became less important economically, and city centers and people moved away. Many waterfronts were abandoned, having lost their use. In some places, when the economic energy came from another direction, non-water-dependent uses later developed along the waterfront. A former mayor of Gloucester explained the phenomenon to me this way: "When the fish stocks go down, fishing-related uses along the waterfront shrink. When stocks rebound, the fishing uses can't expand because they've been locked out by the condos."

Today, the reduced economic power of rivers and seas clearly does not justify our requiring that all waterfront uses be water dependent. But two questions should be asked and answered: First, is this likely to change? And second, if it does, will we be able to revert to water-dependent uses or is the irreversibility described by the mayor correct?

As to the first question, I think change is likely. After all, we live on a planet where 99 percent of life exists in the marine environment. So far, we have figured out how to catch fish, transport goods, and seek pleasure—and that's about it. And we haven't even done the fishing part very intelligently. We haven't really figured out how to tap the oceans for energy, raw materials, new materials, pharmaceuticals, or other uses.

But that will change. The pace of marine discoveries is picking up. We certainly have not made the investment in marine research and development that we have in space exploration. As noted marine explorer Sylvia Earle points out, we spent more on the little Sojourner looking at Mars than we have looking in the oceans of the ocean planet. But scientists at Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, the Marine Biological Lab, MIT, Harvard, UMass/Dartmouth's Center for Marine Science and Technology, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration are energetically pursuing this frontier. And these are just some of the world-class institutions working in New England alone. Discoveries will be made and the largely unnoticed "International Year of the Ocean" proclaimed by the United Nations in 1998 will give way to the "Millennium of the Ocean." It won't be long before waterfronts are once again the engines of local economies.

If this is our future, how should we plan our waterfronts? How do we position ourselves to connect to this energy source? I would suggest that the first thing we need to do is to change our point of view. Instead of looking at the water from the land, we need to follow the example of our ancestors and view the city from the sea, the source of the city's purpose and meaning. We can start by identifying and examining an evolving hierarchy of uses along the water's edge:

**NON-CONNECTING USES** These are uses that prevent people and/or commerce from making the transition from land to water; they render the waterfront inaccessible. These are private uses with no relevance to the water, that neither depend on nor are enhanced by the water's edge. Industrial storage or non-water-dependent manufacturing falls into this lowest category.



**PRIVATE VISUAL CONNECTIONS** These are uses for which the water is only a backdrop for photographs. Many waterfront high-rise offices and residences treat the water only as something to look at, only for the owners or tenants. Although the water is an enhancement for those fortunate enough to occupy these buildings, the public at large is cut off.

**PUBLIC VISUAL CONNECTIONS** Waterfront parks, specialty retail, and scenic highways all allow the public to look at the water. The accessibility allows people to draw inspiration from the sights, smells, sounds and feelings of the water's edge. It is good but passive recreation.

**RECREATIONAL CONNECTIONS** These are uses that allow people to connect physically with the water through recreation. Beaches, fishing piers, marinas, and public landings all serve to bring the general public in touch with the water. With these uses, we allow ourselves more opportunities to be changed by our exposure to what is not our natural habitat.

**WORKING CONNECTIONS** These are uses near the highest end of the hierarchy. They are dependent on water, not enhanced by it. Boatyards, fish docks and processing plants, ferry terminals, freighter and tanker docks, highways and railheads all form the working connection between land and sea and therefore between one community and another. Public accessibility is a plus, but working uses give the waterfront dignity and purpose.

**MARINE RESEARCH** This is the apex. It has the vitality and strength of working uses, but it also adds investment for the future.

Despite its implied value judgments, this hierarchy is *not* meant to encourage a single "highest and best use"; it *is* intended to encourage more critical thinking about the water's edge. It should also raise our standards for the waterfront's potential. The most productive and interesting waterfronts will offer many connections to the sea, favoring those at the upper end of the hierarchy. Multiple active connections will attract a wider constituency, which will learn to appreciate the significance of the water's edge and the great potential of the oceans. They will also foster new uses and more creative ways of thinking about the waterfront. And maintaining active, real connections can solve the dilemma posed by that former mayor of Gloucester who worried about the irreversibility of the decisions we make; changing the nature of the goods or services that pass between land and sea is a lot easier than rebuilding a connection that has been severed. New Englanders have been blessed with waterfronts of great power; we should be leaders in making the most of our good fortune. ■■■

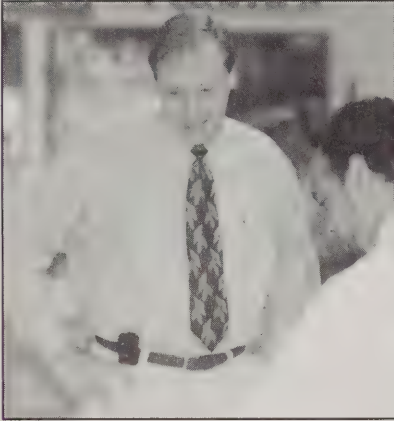
John K. Bullard is the director of the Family Business Center at University of Massachusetts/Dartmouth. The mayor of New Bedford from 1986–1992, he served the Clinton administration as director of the Office of Sustainable Development. He earned architecture and planning degrees at MIT.



Photos: Courtesy The Standard-Times/Jack Ikon, New Bedford



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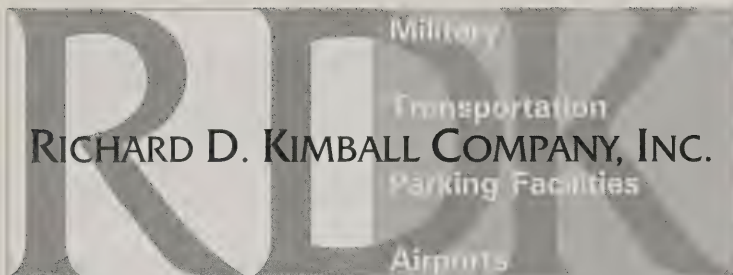


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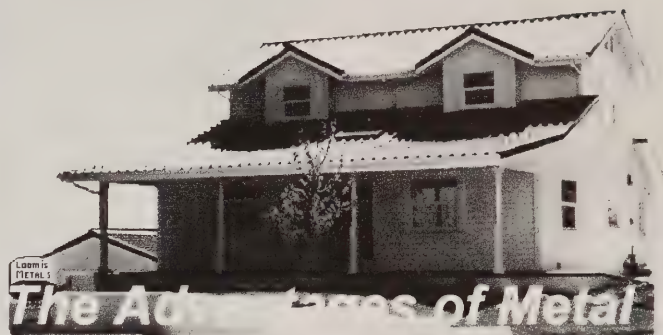
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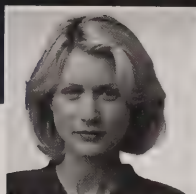


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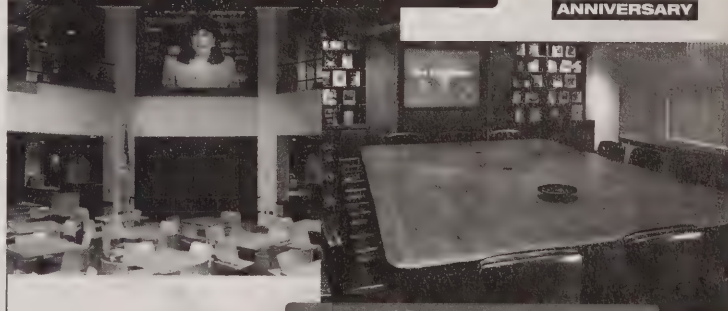
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# Boston's Overlooked Waterfronts

by Antonio Di Mambro FAIA

Photo: Aerial Photos International

**"Anyone knows what a good city is.  
The only question is how to achieve it."**

**Kevin Lynch, *A Theory of Good City Form***



Chelsea Creek

**THE BOSTON REDEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY** recently unveiled the long-awaited South Boston Seaport District Plan. Plan proponents and the affected parties agree that the revised masterplan greatly improves the 1997 release. The plan retains our intimate "Boston scale," even with the incorporation of the convention-center project and its related facilities. Prompted by thoughtful recommendations from special-interest groups, areas for parks, open space, and civic destinations have been set aside. Still unresolved are key transportation and district density development issues—issues that must be addressed in the near future.

Editor's note: For a synopsis of the Seaport District recommendations developed by the BSA Seaport Focus Team, see *ArchitectureBoston* "Society" issue 1998.

Despite the exceptional attention it has received, South Boston, however, is *not* the city's last frontier. Rather, it is a key piece of a larger puzzle—approximately 5,000 acres of underused waterfront land waiting to be redeveloped. South Boston has been blessed with important infrastructure improvements and is now a hot spot, but other parts of the waterfront environment deserve attention and sustained care as well.

Although heralded as an important guiding document for the growth of a new Boston neighborhood, the Seaport plan, produced late in the planning game, acquiesces to earlier key land-use and transportation decisions and neglects the district's future in relation to an overall regional waterfront redevelopment vision. In the end, rather than a new vision for the city's last frontier, the plan is a complex balancing act which attempts to reconcile developers' profit motives with residents' fear of development, and the needs of a perhaps-dying maritime industry with the current tourist and convention-industry boom.

In recent years, some public agencies have seemingly abdicated their responsibilities to conduct broad, long-range planning efforts with regional implications. The focus instead is on the development of incremental district plans that—one hopes—will somehow all fit together. Although Kevin Lynch was undoubtedly right when he said, "Cities cannot be designed as comprehensive wholes in all of their aspects," *ad hoc*, piecemeal, and divisive approaches to planning the future of the city's waterfront will be ineffective in the long run.



The Chelsea Creek, Malden/Mystic Rivers, and the Belle Isle Inlet make up 38 miles of water edge with several large parcels of publicly owned land. These still undiscovered waterfront districts are also a vital part of our maritime heritage and offer exceptional opportunities to redefine the image of our city and region. Today, these vast lands are crossed by highways and cluttered with industrial and maritime remains, but it does not take much to inspire their potential transformation. Take, for example, the Chelsea Creek, a major underused waterway between East Boston, Chelsea, and Revere that feeds into the Inner Harbor. Currently, both edges of this once-important ecological wonder are dumping grounds for rental cars and other airport-related uses, abandoned shipyards, and fuel storage tanks. Relocation of these functions to more appropriate sites—either through consolidation at the Mystic River facility or through already common off-shore platform and pipeline technologies—would open up opportunities to rediscover Chelsea Creek and its spectacular views of downtown, thus making it a focal point of the area and an attraction for the region.

**IMAGINE** a view of the restored river that combines housing, workplaces, and services in human-scale buildings that are integrated with existing neighborhoods, establishing a new north gateway to the city.

**IMAGINE** recreational activities along the riverbanks and a redesigned riverside highway that makes the water's edge more accessible, mirroring memorable parts of the Charles River.

**IMAGINE** this new segment of the city connected to the region by a unified transportation system of circumferential transit, commuter rail lines, and public water transportation.

**IMAGINE** boating facilities, nestled in the natural bend of the river, that accent the grandeur of this space and form a dramatic entrance to the city.

**IMAGINE** a linear park that stretches along the east side of the river and through East Boston, transforming an abandoned railway to the harbor into a new Commonwealth Avenue.

Why, then, are we not pursuing some of these opportunities or paying more serious attention to these valuable waterfront areas? Why are we filling available tracts of land on the Chelsea waterfront with more airport-related uses, thus foreclosing other development options for the area?

We are told that these lands will not be needed for the next 40 years since the new Seaport District can easily accommodate the forecasted growth of the city. We are also told that the relocation of fuel farms and other obsolete uses is a very costly proposition and that, according to Massachusetts Turnpike Authority chairman James Kerasiotes, "it is clear that the federal government's appetite for large projects is gone."

A region that does not plan is a dying region. These facts should hardly deter serious long-range planning for the waterfront. Boston's future cannot rest on the laurels of South Boston redevelopment alone. Nor can it afford to become a Tale of Two Cities: one, stretching from North Station to Commonwealth Pier in South Boston, filled with glitzy hotels, condominium enclaves, fancy restaurants, polished harbor walks, and tourist attractions; the other, east of the inner harbor, filled with a new generation of immigrants and other poor residents who share a largely dilapidated waterfront and the negative impacts of a booming airport.

A good city should equitably distribute its investments and development opportunities. For Boston to retain its competitive advantages and its livable qualities, the time has come to articulate a coherent vision for the long-term transformations that are possible not only in South Boston, but also in the entire metropolitan waterfront area. Such a vision must be bold enough to capture the imagination and aspiration of citizens, and flexible enough to respond to unforeseen political or economic realities. It should include a set of new and coordinated infrastructure improvements designed to unlock the opportunities that are presently constrained, primarily by existing transportation systems and by the regulatory environment.

Infrastructure projects that unlock opportunities for new urban development take 20 to 30 years to implement. The city and the region are reaping the benefits of the visionary transportation plans developed in the early 1970s. Yet today, we still don't have in place a comprehensive and well-coordinated plan for the post-2010 era. This is especially worrisome for Logan International Airport, which is one of the most vital economic engines in the region but has no place to grow at its present location.

No one can deny that waterfront transformations are complex and costly operations that require substantial commitment in public investments for infrastructure improvements. Some researchers estimate that \$30 billion is needed to support the next 30 to 40 years of development. Can the leaders of this city and region meet this challenge, as their predecessors did earlier in this century?

The future of Boston's waterfront is interwoven with that of the surrounding region. The redevelopment of extensive tracts of underused land at the edge of the harbor is a daunting task that cannot be directed by market forces alone. New and substantial transformations of Boston's waterfront are both possible and desirable, but they require a coordinated, shared, and implementable regional vision that is a "win-win" for both suburban and inner-city waterfront communities. This vision requires a compact that transcends jurisdictional lines and personal interests.

Let's get to work! ■■■

Antonio Di Mambro FAIA is president of Antonio Di Mambro + Associates, Inc. in Boston.



# A House by the Sea

Peter Forbes FAIA and George Warner AIA talked recently about the architectural challenges of one of the most evocative, even romantic, images...

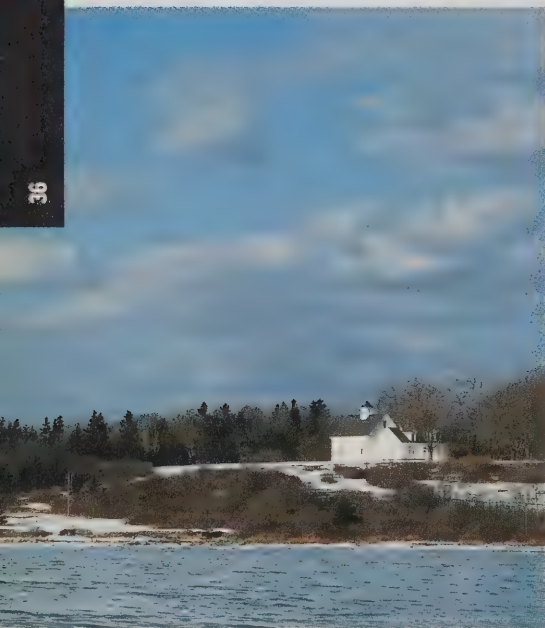


Photo Courtesy: Peter Forbes

## PETER FORBES

is the principal of Peter Forbes and Associates in Boston and Southwest Harbor, ME.

Coast of Maine



## GEORGE WARNER

is a partner in Warner and Cunningham in Chestnut Hill, MA.

**GW:** You live near the water, you build near the water, you work near the water.

**PF:** I've spent most of my life near or on the water. I was born in California, but there's water out there, too, although it's west of Dedham. Ever since I was five years old, I've spent almost every summer on a little island on the coast of Maine. As a child I would rarely go ashore—I could see no reason why anybody would *want* to go ashore. When I first started my office and we didn't have any work, I decided I could either sit here in Boston and listen to the phone not ring or go someplace else. And so I became a charter skipper to earn a living. The ocean is such a profound part of my life that I don't think it's any accident that now most of our work is on the water. I don't think we've done a project that's more than 100 yards from the water. We've had a few that were farther away, but either the projects died or we got fired.

**GW:** I've had a similar relationship with the water. I was born in Cuba, an island. I grew up in Miami, on an island that's connected to the mainland by a causeway that you cross every day to go to school or to work. I've worked in Puerto Rico, another island, and I've worked in Maine on islands similar to ones you've worked on. I think that the isolation of islands is something that influences people—their perception of life is very different when they're in these places. It's time out of the treadmill.

**PF:** I think it's even more than that. If you're on an island, the ocean and the weather and the rigor that they impose upon you are very present. You never go through breakfast without listening to the weather.

**GW:** But people also bring a very different set of aspirations to the seashore. When they buy a piece of land on the ocean for a house, there's usually a tighter set of constraints. Some are environmental, but I think a lot of them come from higher expectations for these precious locations. And the ocean also affects the way we build—not just the materials, but also the character. One example that's present in your houses is the desire to simplify. There's no clutter.



**PF:** I think that's terribly important. The ocean comes down hard on anything that is irrational. When you look at boat designs that have persisted over time, you see that that which was superfluous isn't there any more. There's a Darwinian weeding-out of things. The fishing boat at the turn of the century in Maine was the Friendship sloop. There was precious little on that boat. There's one piece of decorative carving. And then there's the lobster boat of today. There's nothing on that boat that isn't absolutely necessary. Because if it isn't necessary, it's the one thing that will catch on your foul-weather gear. It will get broken. It will cause a problem. And if there's a problem on the ocean—the ocean always has the bottom of the ninth, so to speak. It isn't going to lose. If there is one weak link—

**GW:** It will be found out.

**PF:** Yes. I happen to live in an 1890 Shingle Style house. It is a disaster. No one in his right mind, and certainly nobody who had to worry about doing the maintenance themselves, would ever have built one of those houses. I spend all my time and a great deal of my annual income fixing the place up from year to year. In the old days, summer people lived in these houses for two or three months and then the locals rebuilt them for nine or ten. But that's when guys got a dollar a day. The houses for everybody else were stripped right down—look at the archetypal, coast-of-Maine house.

**GW:** It's not filled with embellishments.

**PF:** Right. And I think one of the things that's terribly important to remember today is that if the builders could have got away with it, there would have been even less embellishment. Cornerboards were used in 19th-century houses because that was the only way they could end clapboard or shingles and have a reasonable joint. We don't need cornerboards now—you can wrap flashing or bituthane around the corner. Putting cornerboards on houses, as many people do, is an historicist fetish. Given today's materials, the Pilgrim Fathers wouldn't have done it. But then they probably would have used Texture 111 [plywood] if they'd had it.

**GW:** This makes me think again of boats. There aren't a lot of extra pieces on boats, but the pieces that are there work well and look good, with no wasted effort. Nathaniel Herreshoff, the boat builder, has to be held up as the pinnacle of that. He was constantly experimenting. He made the fastest motorboats, the fastest sailboats—and they look great. He wasn't afraid of modeling up a new cleat or a new anchor. And even those little pieces pleased the eye.

**PF:** One of the things we have found is that the boat-building industry today is still not afraid of the custom-made piece of hardware that exactly suits the purpose. It's unlike the construction industry, where the tendency is to go to the catalogue and see what's available and accommodate the design to fit what's there.

**GW:** So many of our materials are prefabricated—"plug and play"—that it is difficult to find the small shop that can produce exacting work. We had two boat companies price up some stainless steel stanchions for a house. One was in Rhode Island and one was in Michigan. You're forced to run far afield to attempt these things.

**PF:** Yes. We're using metal more and more, because wood is getting worse and worse. I've had great luck getting metal parts machined, usually by people who are connected with the maritime industry. I don't think we could build the houses we do 50 miles inland, because we couldn't get those guys.

**GW:** There's no doubt that the ability to fabricate these things—not to mention the availability of materials like stainless steel, grades of aluminum that now stand up to the ocean, laminated glass that can replace the need for shutters—changes the possibilities for what we build along the oceanfront. But another thought that occurs to me is that our beloved, traditional houses were intended to endure the harsh New England winter. Many of these same buildings have been renovated and adapted over time for use in the summer, when in fact you'd like the weather to come in. Now we're looking for air and light, and ease of entry and exit—a house that is much more transparent and porous in everyday life. And that's not a traditional idea. So we have to adapt not only the materials but also our mindset to the way we really would like to live in these houses.

**PF:** That's true. If you were a fisherman, and you'd spent 12 to 16 hours fishing, you wouldn't want to come home and look at the ocean. You'd want a little window so you could see your boat on its mooring and check to make sure it's okay. But otherwise, you'd want to watch the big-screen TV. The old Maine houses didn't have porches where one looked at the ocean. They had porches that looked at the road, so that you could watch what was going on and get all the gossip and see so-and-so's truck outside so-and-so's house. That's much more interesting to somebody who has spent 12 to 16 hours on the ocean. It's only vacationers—people who are not earning their living on the ocean—who really want to sit there and look at the ocean. And those are often the people for whom we're building houses. Twelve years ago we did nothing but vacation houses, and now we do year-round houses on the coast of Maine because people can live there with a modem and a fax machine, and they don't have to live in the city in order to do their business. They're there because of the ocean—for all those psychic and aesthetic reasons that we were talking about.

**GW:** And so we're placing very different demands on these houses. People change their lives and develop enormous expectations for these houses—although nobody wants to spend all their income on maintaining them.

**PF:** Maintenance is a big deal, and that's why I say that those Shingle Style houses are a nightmare. I think the people who are building them are spitting in the eye of Providence.



Why? I cannot think of any rational reason why you would build an old-style building on the ocean. I cannot. The only reason I can think of is some sort of vague nostalgia for a life on the ocean which really doesn't exist now. I think you'd be hard-pressed to get the ladies to wear long dresses on picnics or for playing croquet all summer.

**GW:** Croquet is having a big comeback.

**PF:** But they wear shorts.

**GW:** When you combine this change in life along the ocean with a change in materials, you end up with a whole new set of very interesting challenges and opportunities. Over time, we see houses adapting, and we're finding houses on the coast that are starting to look different. They're just small steps, but they're making little inroads into what we traditionally think of as the house on the seashore. But then you can't help but wonder about those influences on people's expectations of the villages and towns and harbors along the shore.

**PF:** Yes. I worry about the places that impose design review or a particular style, such as Nantucket. That's a fly trapped in amber, and it would be nice to think that the fly trapped in amber serves some higher aesthetic purpose. But I think the fly has been trapped by a real-estate market that says, "We know that this will sell, and we are unwilling to take the risk of somebody coming in and doing something different, even if it might be better."

**GW:** One aspect of towns like Nantucket, Provincetown, Edgartown, Camden, is that today's zoning standards, which don't allow for mixed use, would not allow these wonderful places to be built today. I think if people were asked to choose the five places they'd most like to visit along the New England coast, none of them could be recreated by either today's zoning regulations or zoning climate.

**PF:** I think you're absolutely right. An example of that is my little town in Maine. Most of these towns were built around industrial zones, when the oceans were the highways. This particular town has kept a lot of that aspect. There are 12 boatyards, and there are two fish piers—it's a very active working port. People earn their living there. And unfortunately, a lot of the town has now become a retirement community. People come there because they visited and they liked it—they liked the vitality, and they liked all the different activities in the harbor, the boats coming and going and the fishermen coming and going. But then they moved there, and they found that lobster

traps stacked in these yards start to smell bad on a hot summer day, and the fishing boats leak oil, and the fish piers drop all kinds of junk into the water. And they want to clean it up. They want to turn it into a postcard. It's part of the Disneyfication of the world, the kind of thing that is institutionalized in places like Seaside, where everything has to be quaint. The great hope is that the ocean will destroy quaint.

**GW:** Those places are fraudulent.

**PF:** And what's more, they're a bad joke on the people who buy into them, just for those reasons that we were talking about. Those buildings cannot survive in that rigorous environment. The maintenance will be astronomic. The materials will fail. And, unfortunately, we don't even have the quality of materials that were used in those traditional buildings today. We don't have wood of that quality any more. It's environmentally irresponsible to use a lot of it even if you can get it. And so we're stuck with hem-fir studs that are lousy, we're stuck with shingles that aren't very good. We're stuck with wood windows that are finger-jointed together out of inferior pieces of pine. There are workers coming along who are just as skillful as some of these old carpenters who I'm fortunate to still be able to get on the coast of Maine, but you can't find them in very many places. I had a group of carpenters—unemployed boat-builders—who built my houses over the winter. They made 1/8-inch reveals that didn't vary over 16 feet. They were perfect. When I commented on that, one of the guys said, "You know, if you're off an eighth of an inch in our usual line of work, it sinks." That's a rigor that the architectural profession has unfortunately had to forsake, because we couldn't get the workmanship.

**GW:** I don't know if you've ever been to Miami, but there is a house built by one of the early settlers there—Ralph Monroe, who was a boat designer and a good friend of Herreshoff. And he brought those same sensibilities to his house. It's right on the shore, and it's survived all the big hurricanes. It has a tear-away wall in the front and back [to allow storm surges to flow through], and a very high ceiling with windows at the top that open with a pulley for ventilation. And he had a fireplace so he could dry out his books.

**PF:** That's the combination of invention and craftsmanship that the maritime tradition fostered. Most Americans have forgotten that. I'll take this a step further and say that the United States has forgotten its maritime aspect. It's abdicated legislation that would favor American fishing. The American Merchant Marine is in a shambles because of taxation



and regulation. The United States doesn't think of itself as a maritime power. And it doesn't know how to deal with its ocean frontage. That's why people see the waterfront as just something to look at, not something to interact with. I think that's a flawed vision, but it's a very prevalent vision. We're a very mobile society, and there isn't much of an indigenous maritime population except in places like the Carolinas and Maine. But they're under siege from a country that only views them as quaint. They aren't quaint. They're very, very real. And the things that they do are real, and the way they go about making things is real. And their vision of this big body of water doesn't stop at Labor Day. There's that moment in the fall when the water changes color, and it's got a different sound, and it'll kill you that quick. And those people don't go home. But because most Americans are no longer a maritime people, their relationship to the water has to be consciously rediscovered. It's a function of urban design in waterfront cities, I think, to provide those interactions between people and the water—even if it can never be as vital a place as Venice, for example, where everyone earns their living with respect to some relationship with the water.

**GW:** But even Venice has a certain amount of artifice to it. It's an historical anomaly.

**PF:** True. But even though it's a tourist attraction, one of the neatest things I've seen was a couple of motor boats in Venice. One was white and orange and purple and the other was dark brown, and they were the FedEx boat and UPS boat making deliveries. And the guys had their little FedEx and UPS uniforms on. It was real commerce because the packages had to go by boat. But it was *real*. ■■■

Photo: Paul Ferrino

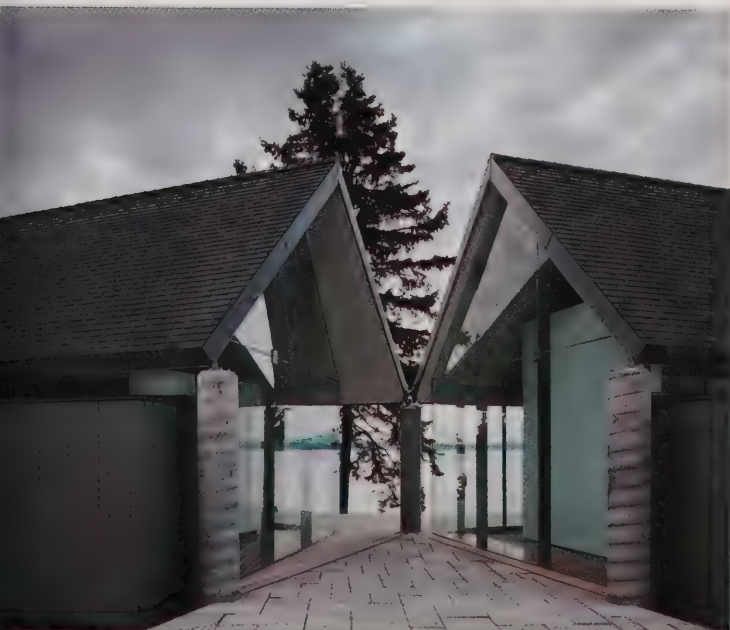


Photo: © Nick Wheeler

Houses by Peter Forbes  
and Associates:

Above,  
Wharton House  
Seal Cove, ME

Left,  
Nordberg House  
Surry, ME





Seldom does a community get worked up about saving a small, wooden, long-abandoned paint factory. But seldom does such a factory sit at the edge of a harbor like Gloucester's. Isolated but prominent, this group of 1863 red buildings, emblazoned with oversized white lettering, has become an icon that not even Disney Imagineers could replicate. These barn-like buildings are probably more indelibly etched in the psyche of locals and visitors than is the famous Man at the Wheel statue.

No longer viable as a paint factory, the buildings maintain financial value thanks to their location. Sited with commanding views of the harbor and the skyline, and surrounded by the historic houses of the Rocky Neck artist colony, the old factory has long tempted developers. Recently, after years of neglect, a willing seller and a robust economy combined to attract a developer with a serious and sensitive reuse proposal. Agreements were reached assuring preservation standards, public access to the site, and community use of the first floor. The only remaining hurdle was a change from industrial to residential zoning that would allow the developer to retrofit the structure for six residential condominiums.

Instead, luxury condominiums became the flash point for a long-simmering debate about the waterfront's future. Concerned that the city's 375-year history as a working harbor was already threatened by declining fish stocks, new harvesting methods, and changing distribution systems, opponents expressed concern that luxury residences would drive traditional but less financially rewarding uses from the harbor. The fear was that wealthy, politically-connected residents would not appreciate the diesel smell of puttering boats leaving the harbor at 5 A.M. nor welcome the public's presence on "their" waterfront.

The City Council defeated the proposed zoning change after two votes. The owner, in retaliation, pulled a demolition permit. But the ever-resourceful developer appealed to the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) and was granted approval based on a claim of financial hardship. A group of citizens claimed political impropriety, and members of the ZBA responded with a libel suit. Finally, when abutters

Photo: Dan B. Goodenow/AIA

Sometimes a building is more than a building. Gloucester's Paint Factory, perched at the edge of the harbor, is an example. Architecturally

undistinguished, it nevertheless has become a powerful symbol of this city's maritime traditions, and the fierce battle over its future reflects the tensions facing many waterfront communities.



filed a court appeal, the developer threw in the towel. Benign neglect preserved the buildings for years, but the public process resulted in acrimony, a demolition permit, and the threat of losing the beloved icon.

Other ports have fought, and to a large extent lost, the battle to maintain their working waterfronts. But this port is clearly an endangered regional asset and, to Gloucester's credit, opposition to anything but a working harbor runs as deep and as solid as the city's granite underpinnings. Fortunately, a Harbor Master Plan Committee has been developing a much-needed common vision for the waterfront—a uniquely complex effort in that the harbor, besieged by a steady influx of trucks and tourists, is tightly bound by commercial, civic, and historic residential districts. Nevertheless, the Committee has successfully brought many divergent interests to the table and seems to be nurturing a realistic and supportable vision for the future.

The Paint Factory skirmish may be won or lost, depending on your point of view, but the battle continues. If Gloucester awakens some morning to find that this icon is gone forever, the entire community must share both the loss and the blame. For preservationists, the lesson learned here is that, to win future battles, pre-emptive strikes on the field of public planning will be increasingly necessary. The intensity that has been focused on saving buildings and establishing historic districts must now be brought equally to the more elusive, complicated, and politicized target of long-range community planning. If Gloucester's little red buildings beat the odds and survive, they will continue to remind us of how well one community learned this lesson. ■■■

#### **R. Kirk Noyes**

is an architecturally educated developer and chairman of the Gloucester Historic Commission.



# Two Views

## Gloucester's Paint Factory

R. Kirk Noyes and Wendy Fitting

**Wendy Fitting**  
has been the pastor  
of the Unitarian  
Universalist Church in  
Gloucester, MA, for  
nine years. Her  
Swedish ancestors  
are buried in  
Gloucester.

One summer Sunday I announced to my congregation that there would be an event at the Temple in the coming week. A parishioner who had been born and brought up in Gloucester was incredulous. An event at the Temple? "You mean under the Paint Factory?" he asked.

At least two generations of teen-age kids in Gloucester have gathered in the "Temple," well hidden from authoritative scrutiny. At low tide amid the pilings under the old Tarr and Wonson Paint Factory, the Temple becomes a place of perfect mystery and ritual for the richness of adolescent imagination. That the Temple is subject to the tide and the weather means it is often inaccessible and suggests it is home to awesome forces beyond human control.

To get to the Temple's concealed entrance, you have to clamber down a steep, uneven wall of granite rocks at the edge of the harbor. A couple of years ago, I went into the Temple at low tide to see an installation by a group of local artists. The place was spooky and enchanting, but in a matter of weeks, the guerrilla show was closed by the building's owners, who were quite legitimately horrified by the potential danger.

There are places—battlefields, buildings, features in the natural landscape, street corners, burial grounds—that suddenly, because of tragedy, are no longer simply places; they become numinous, that is, we sense an invisible presence about them, something awesome and holy. Gettysburg, Auschwitz, Wounded Knee, and Dealey Plaza in Dallas are examples. There are also places that over decades become similarly numinous, perhaps known only as widely as the surrounding neighborhood, or to a particular generation of high-school kids.

These carry the imprint of collective memory. It is no wonder that the Temple is so named. The Paint Factory has become a repository for memories and stories that are sacred to many Gloucester residents.

Historical commissions affix plaques to places to authenticate their significance. But spiritual archeology will reveal that every city, town, and village has other sites just as sacred—unmarked, unadvertised, but known in the relational memory of the people. This quality of the sacred cannot be built into new, model communities—such as Disney-sponsored Celebration in Florida—no matter the neighborly porches and parks. And this is because time and continuity of memory are essential to the quality of sacredness.

The Paint Factory is no longer simply a building. It is the symbol of centuries of uninterrupted industry on the waterfront. Converting the building to residential condominiums would alter the site's identity, further restricting public access. And it would also signal the accelerating loss of our working waterfront.

People often don't realize the importance of a place until its existence or character is threatened. Sometimes when the bearers of memory have been scattered and no one is left to identify it, a sacred site is desecrated—torn down or paved over. The reverberations of such loss erode the traditions of dying, grieving, and remembering, and a community's way of life is damaged or lost, its root system destroyed.

This would simply be a matter of historical interest, devolving to nostalgia, or a wistful longing for the past, except that there is a vivifying link between the traditional wisdom of a community of memory and the vision of a community of imagination. Because Gloucester is such a place, there is a gratifying breadth of ideas for the future of the Paint Factory. A richly imaginative vision of community development draws much of its energy from a healthy root system of collective stories. In the current conversation about what constitutes civil society, it is good to consider the story of the Paint Factory. Without the root system, the top soil will not support growth. ■■■



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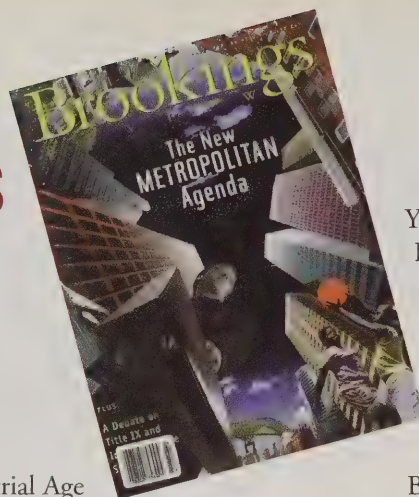






# Covering the Issues

Periodical roundup  
by Gretchen Schneider



**Say it again...** Industrial Age cities were dirty and overcrowded and relied on physical connections to manufacture and distribute goods. Information Age cities can be spacious, green, even virtual. In the Internet Age, place is irrelevant. Paul Goldberger challenges this widely-held notion through his book review of *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898* (The New Yorker, November 30, 1998). The lesson

Goldberger distills from *Gotham*—a massive, big-as-its-subject history of New York—is that New York was the “first modern city, the first city to grow huge on the basis not of the things it made or even the objects it traded but on the information it exchanged.” For two centuries, New York’s energized, information-based economy has grown exponentially precisely because the city offers physical proximity—the chance to meet and greet. Goldberger makes the oldest urban argument fresh again: Virtual’s overrated. Place matters.

**Yet more lists...** With its December 7, 1998, “Builders and Titans” issue, *Time* continues to compile *fin-de-siècle* lists. What do you consider the most influential construction projects of the past 100 years? *Time* lauds the Empire State Building, the US Interstate Highway System, the French/English Chunnel, the Panama Canal, and China’s Three Gorges Dam as our greatest “monuments of the age.” At least one rings true: Like the railroad before it, nothing’s changed the American landscape more in this century than the freeway.

**Sprawl hits the big time...** “Suburban sprawl,” notes New Jersey Governor Christine Todd Whitman in the *Brookings Review* Fall 1998 issue, “is eating up open space, creating mind-boggling traffic jams, bestowing on us endless strip malls and housing developments, and consuming an ever-increasing share of our resources.”

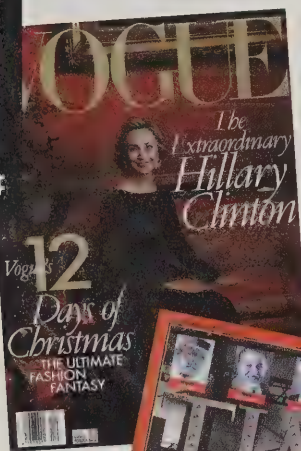
Yeah, yeah, yeah...we’ve all said this for years. But what is news is that sprawl concerns have finally left the marginalized realm of academics and architects and captured the attention of more powerful politicians and CEOs. This is not another New Urbanism promotion piece. Instead, this extremely thoughtful and accessible series of articles (written by

Brookings fellows and political leaders) discusses physical, environmental, and societal aspects of 20th-century American growth without purporting to provide all the answers. Echoing Lewis Mumford’s 70-year-old argument, the *Brookings Review*’s overall message is to consider city-making from an interdependent, regional—or “metropolitan”—perspective. The New Metropolitanism? For anyone who’s ever heard of “transit-oriented development” or the Congress for the New Urbanism, or who’s cursed cookie-cutter subdivisions and cloverleaves, this magazine’s a must-read.

**Pedestrian ideas...** All cities have Traffic Departments with well-recorded data on traffic and parking, but do any also have a Pedestrian Department? For the past 30 years, Copenhagen’s Jan Gehl has effectively created just that. With researchers from the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, this architect has observed and analyzed pedestrian streets, public spaces, and public life in his city; his observations are published in the Fall 1998 issue of *Places*. Copenhagen incrementally closed streets to traffic while Gehl’s team systematically monitored results. They’ve related pedestrian activity directly to specific characteristics of physical place, thus linking intent, program, design, and use. Their sustained research shows that even a cold-climate city can employ specific design elements to cultivate pedestrian activity; their work creates an invaluable resource for any city trying to enhance public life.

**Historical chic...** We must be making progress when a Clinton story mentions architecturally significant theaters more than Monica. *Vogue*’s December 1998 cover story on Hillary Clinton describes her newly-launched “campaign to restore America’s decaying historical treasures.” The article—written neither by, about, or for architects—puts buildings where they belong, as an integral part of a broader cultural context. Predictably, the story focuses more on personality than preservation, but mainstream architectural air time is always good, especially from the First Lady.

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# Books **The New Waterfront: A Worldwide Urban Success Story**

Ann Breen and Dick Rigby  
McGraw-Hill, 1996

Reviewed by David Spillane RIBA



The economic and civic roles of the urban waterfront have changed profoundly over the last 30 years. The gritty industrial image of the urban waterfront of the 1950s has increasingly been supplanted in the public imagination by a more refined image of the waterfront associated with civic amenity, recreation, and entertainment. As cities compete globally to attract jobs and investment, images of urban waterfronts—captured in a postcard view—are increasingly used as dynamic symbols of community identity and vitality.

*The New Waterfront: A Worldwide Urban Success Story* examines the changing character of waterfront development through documentation of over 100 projects completed since the 1960s. Authors Ann Breen and Dick Rigby—founders of The Waterfront Center in Washington, DC—have expanded on their earlier examination of recent projects in North America, *Waterfronts: Cities Reclaim Their Edge*, to include examples across the world. Despite clear national and regional differences in the character of the selected projects, these waterfront transformations share many common origins. The availability of large tracts of land brought about by the relocation of port operations, railyards, and older industrial uses away from urban centers has created the opportunity for large-scale waterfront redevelopment. Cleaner water—the legacy of environmental policies and increased public awareness—has dramatically changed the potential of waterfront sites in the rivers and harbors of the developed world. Increased demand for leisure and recreational facilities such as museums, aquariums (perhaps the most notable new waterfront invention), and places for public festivals and events has added a new source of activity to these districts. And a willingness in some areas of the world to consider the preservation and reuse of older industrial buildings and port

structures has provided a tangible reminder of history in many waterfront projects.

Breen and Rigby have identified seven themes through which they examine waterfront redevelopment: major transformations (district-wide masterplans such as Baltimore's Inner Harbor, still seen as one of the most influential waterfront revitalization projects in the world); the commercial waterfront (restaurant, retail, hotel, and office projects such as Southgate in Melbourne, Australia, and Rows Wharf in Boston); the cultural, educational, and environmental waterfront (including Cambridge Seven's Ring of Fire Aquarium and Tadao Ando's Suntory Museum, both in Osaka, Japan); the historic waterfront (involving selective preservation and reuse of existing structures, such as the shophouses of Boat Quay in Singapore and the warehouses, cranes, and waterways of Puerto Madero in Argentina); the recreational waterfront (including Parc de la Villette in Paris and the grand promenade in Kuching, Malaysia); the residential waterfront (projects in Amsterdam, Berlin, and Helsinki); and the working waterfront and transportation (ferry terminals in Tokyo, Oakland, and Hamburg).

The "new waterfront" described by the authors has three recurring ingredients: continuous public pedestrian access; densities that support waterfront activity; and special uses that promote the waterfront as a place of entertainment and civic celebration. Breen and Rigby are enthusiastic advocates—perusing the book is like viewing the travel pictures of a knowledgeable friend. Of the approximately 100 projects that are documented, almost 40 are discussed in detail and illustrated through several hundred photographs. Documenting such a large

number of projects requires inevitable compromises between breadth and depth; it is never fully possible to grasp the complexity of any individual project or the factors that have shaped it.

Despite the success of many of these projects, *The New Waterfront* leaves us with some troubling and unanswered questions that receive little attention in this book. Many of the waterways that adjoin the featured projects appear distressingly underused, sometimes serving only as reflecting pools for new signature buildings or as homes for the occasional historic vessel. Many of the uses that line the "new waterfront" take advantage of the view but have only incidental links to the water itself. In separating the boats and activities of the working port from the "new waterfront," many projects have lost a compelling visual attraction, often replacing unselfconscious vitality with a tamer, more programmed passivity. As we celebrate the enhanced public character of the "new waterfront," we should remember our public spaces are most alive and meaningful when they enable us to encounter life in all its messy diversity. The postcard view is no substitute for the reality of public space experienced in three dimensions and in color.



David Spillane RIBA is a planner and urban designer at Vanasse Hangen Brustlin in Watertown, MA. He is working on the harbor masterplan for New Bedford, MA.



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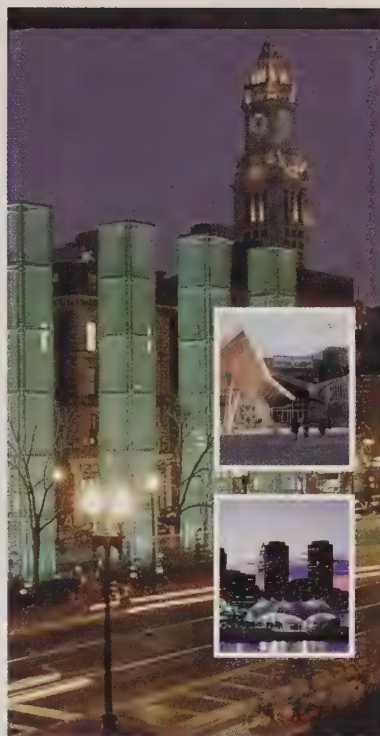
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Books

## The Houses of McKim, Mead & White

by Samuel G. White;  
photographs by  
Jonathan Wallen  
Rizzoli, 1998

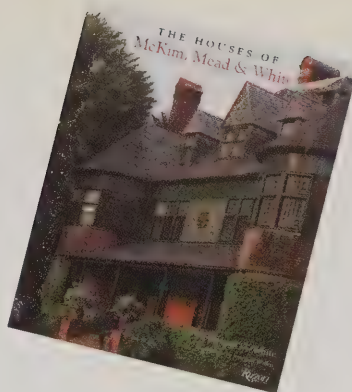
Reviewed by Jacob Albert AIA

Seaside resorts have been incubators for some of America's most memorable and most delightful architecture. The relatively modest cost of even elaborate summer houses (compared to major urban buildings) has allowed for experimental design. And the lighthearted nature of vacation living by the seashore has encouraged exuberant responses by architects.

A handsome new volume, *The Houses of McKim, Mead & White* by Samuel G. White, an architect and great-grandson of Stanford White, begins with the seaside cottages of this celebrated American firm and offers a sumptuous feast of images, with glorious color photographs by Jonathan Wallen. In the introduction we learn that McKim, Mead & White received over 300 house commissions between 1879 and 1912, comprising about 40 percent of the firm's jobs. The author presents in depth 32 choice examples, 21 of which are in coastal resorts.

The Shingle Style, an original synthesis of sources exotic and foreign as well as homely and American, arrived like a fresh breeze on the shores of New Jersey, Long Island, and New England in the mid-1870s. Along with H.H. Richardson, Peabody & Stearns, and William Ralph Emerson, McKim, Mead & White was among its originators and most inventive practitioners.

At the forefront of Shingle Style design by the early 1880s, McKim, Mead & White led the way over the next decade to a more academic, historicist approach. The book traces the development of the firm's domestic work from the six modest picturesque cottages of



the Montauk Point Association (1882), through more rigorously ordered Colonial Revival designs such as the Samuel Parrish house (1889) in Southampton, to grandiloquent classical mansions such as Rosecliff (1887-1902) in Newport.

One little-known exception to the progression from picturesque to more orderly compositions is the earliest house in the book, the Prescott Hall Butler house (1878-80) on Long Island. It is organized into one enormous frontal gable, anticipating by nine years the celebrated Low house in Bristol, Rhode Island. Both houses were the work of Charles McKim, who had a predilection for geometric simplification. Among other revelations is Stanford White's quirky design for his own house on Long Island. At Box Hill (1885-1902), still owned by his descendants, walls and ceilings are covered with grass matting. Exposed steel beams in the living room stand out amid the baroque bric-a-brac collected on European shopping sprees.

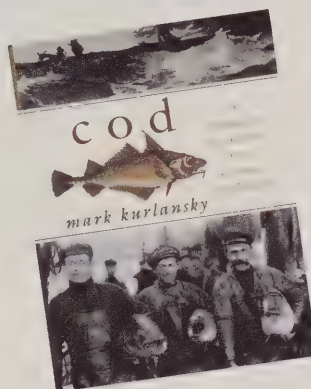
Samuel White draws on the scholarship of Vincent Scully, Leland Roth, and others as well as on his own knowledge of the families and clients of McKim, Mead & White. He has a keen eye and direct experience with the workings of an architect's office. His book is a valuable—and beautiful—contribution to our understanding of some of McKim, Mead & White's liveliest and most appealing work. ■■■

Jacob Albert AIA is a principal in Albert, Righter & Tittmann Architects in Boston. He received a B.A. and M.Arch. from Yale, where he was head teaching assistant for Vincent Scully.

## Cod: A Biography of the Fish that Changed the World

by Mark Kurlansky  
Walker & Co., 1997

Reviewed by A. D. Chandler



Mark Kurlansky's short and entertaining book has nothing whatsoever to do with architecture. So if you, dear reader, wish to read about architecturally relevant subjects, forget this book. If, on the other hand, you have any curiosity about the interaction of cod and man—or more pompously, the relationship of natural resources to economic development—then buy it (especially now that it is available in paperback). This is particularly the case should you wish to consider yourself a New Englander. True New Englanders know a thing or two about codfish. They also like eating it, and Kurlansky spices his effort with a postscript full of entertaining recipes—some of which I might even try myself.

*Cod* is excellent. Kurlansky's prose is clean and flows as free as any ocean swell—his career as a journalist shines through. He writes seriously but with a pleasing wit tinged only by occasional touches of creeping sardonicism. Kurlansky clearly has no interest in treating us with academic pretensions. Rather, he spins an environmental yarn of engaging proportions.

Kurlansky has been smitten both by his subject and the men who made its harvest their life and living. He has dug well into its

history and its traditions, demonstrating an impressive skill at weaving intriguing detail into eloquent text. Take as an example his description of Lunenburg, Nova Scotia:

The town of Lunenburg was built on a hill running down to a sheltered harbor. On one of the upper streets stands a Presbyterian church with a huge gilded cod on its weather vane. Along the waterfront, the wooden-shingled houses are brick red, a color that originally came from mixing clay with cod-liver oil to protect the wood against the salt of the waterfront. It is the look of Nova Scotia—brick red wood, dark green pine, charcoal sea.

There are occasions when Kurlansky—the-journalist trips over Kurlansky—the-biographer. Biography is, after all, within the family of history, and (speaking as a one-time history teacher) I must warn readers about a handful of unfortunate errors. For example, to describe Portugal as “throw[ing] in its lot with Spain” in 1581 is like describing Poland as joining up with Nazi Germany. The little kingdom may have “merged,” but only because Philip of Spain took advantage of the death of the Portuguese king and most of his nobles while they were on Crusade. Kurlansky also appears to conflate Pilgrims with Puritans. The religious colony at Plymouth was distinct from the Puritan Massachusetts Bay Colony. While this error is common, it's still unfortunate. But despite these inaccuracies, *Cod* remains a fascinating and delectable introduction to the fish upon which Massachusetts was built. ■■■

From 1980 until 1995, A. D. Chandler worked in and around the fish and seafood industry as a writer, lobbyist, and analyst—a career that took him as close to codfish as any career could. He now lives and works on the North Shore of Massachusetts.



## Manhattan Shores: An Expedition Around the Island's Edge

by Laura Rosen

Thames and Hudson, 1998

Reviewed by Peter Vanderwarker

*Manhattan Shores* chronicles a journey around the remarkably rich Manhattan waterfront by an architectural photographer and lifelong New Yorker. Shooting images in a clockwise progression around the one-by-nine-mile island, Laura Rosen reveals the endless variety of land and seascapes that make up Manhattan's shoreline—beautiful woodlands, scenic bridges, parks, esplanades, as well as phenomenally ugly truck terminals, old tires, rotting piers, empty asphalt lots, and hideous waterfront highways.

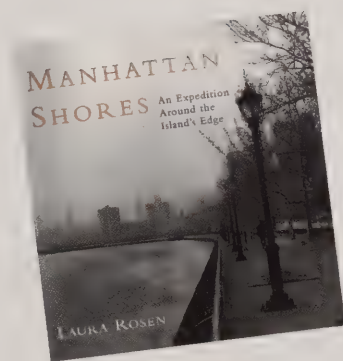
It is odd that in a place as congested as Manhattan, the shores are an amazingly underpopulated demilitarized zone of wasted real estate. The wonderful open spaces, fresh air, and views are enjoyed by a tiny population of joggers, fishermen, and maintenance crews. Perhaps this is because most of us never get to the waterfront. For anyone arriving by automobile, the shores of the East River exist as a series of one-second blips seen from behind the windshield while dodging taxis on the FDR Drive. For those entering the city by train or tunnel, the shoreline does not exist at all. Although Battery Park and Hudson River Park are attracting recreational activity, the rest of the waterfront has yet to make the transition from the old uses of industry and shipping.

The photographs are excellent because they are simple. Most were shot with a twin lens Rolleiflex, a modest camera that belonged to Rosen's father, which "sees" a square of medium focal length. This gives the photos, all black-and-white, a direct, unmanipulated honesty that makes them much more powerful than if they had been shot in large format with wide-angle lenses—the usual tool for architectural photographers.

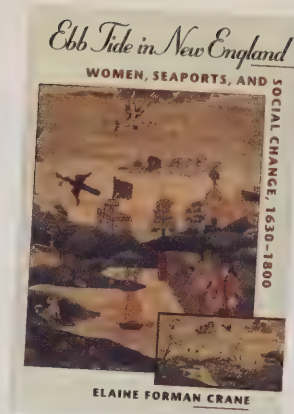
*Manhattan Shores* is full of ironic and humorous juxtapositions that continue to reward anyone who takes time to look—a sleek sports-car hood, for example, next to the hull of a square-rigged ship at South Street. The images are non-judgmental, and the text and captions are clear and simple. An informative fold-out map shows the major features of the Manhattan waterfront.

Photographing a city for history requires making guesses about what will be important in a hundred years. It requires balancing a desire for objectivity with the knowledge that we can't escape the influences of our own time. *Manhattan Shores* documents the slow transition of the Manhattan shoreline into a vital piece of the city—and it seems that Rosen has indeed made all the right guesses. Her book belongs on the shelf of anyone who cares about the crucial places where our cities meet the water.

■■■



Peter Vanderwarker is an architectural photographer in Newton, MA, and a regular contributor to the *Boston Globe*. His publications include *Cityscapes* (with Robert Campbell FAIA), *Boston Then and Now*, and the forthcoming *The Hidden Gardens of Beacon Hill*.



## Ebb Tide in New England: Women, Seaports and Social Change 1630-1800

by Elaine Forman Crane

Northeastern University Press,  
1998

Reviewed by Anne Tate AIA

One approaches a book subtitled "Women, Seaports and Social Change" with aspirations for learning about the lives of women and the history of seaports. Hoping to be hit with the bracing air of the sea, one encounters instead the musty aroma of historiographic argument. No illuminating discussion of place, biography, or chronology occurs in this "history." Disconnected facts, speculations, and generalizations displace and overpower the people and places theoretically at the heart of the story.

Ostensibly based on a study of four New England seaports—Boston, Salem, Newport, and Portsmouth—this book will frustrate anyone hoping to learn about the history of these towns. In describing the "demography, layout and organization of the eighteenth century seaport," Crane opts for a generalized description of ports rather than vivid details about one place. The revelation that "the intimate relationship between the sea and the seaport was nothing less than symbiotic" is little less than idiotic.

The author makes use of selected stories of real women to introduce each chapter. The information in these excerpts is tantalizing but brief. Never resumed, explained, or elaborated, these biographies float disconnected

from the main argument, their stories not allowed to come to life or to affect the structure of the argument. Furthermore, the information that is presented lacks chronological order; facts and anecdotes are drawn from 20 decades of history across two continents, making it difficult to follow the "progress" of women's changing status.

In the prologue, Crane states that she examined these seaport towns in a period when women began to significantly outnumber men, assuming she would uncover an increase in female autonomy. Instead, she found a more rapid decrease in women's power and ability to operate freely. Female participation in colonial seaport towns was sharply limited and defined by a patriarchal society. It is her thesis that as the informal social arrangements of early American settlements became more developed and codified, they became less hospitable to women.

Ironically, the author's literary decisions and devices marginalize these women all over again. Within the book, their sphere of influence is sharply constrained. Their life stories appear as mere data, as decorative embellishments to the chapter introductions.

This approach to scholarship renders the issues anemic and abstract, no small feat considering the vigorous and colorful stories which must be buried under the avalanche of information. Neither the people nor the places in this work are allowed to accumulate enough force to affect the arguments or construction of the book. The facts are conscripted in service of an argument rather than serving as the well-spring of understanding. Where one hopes to be swept along by a dramatic tide of history, this *Ebb Tide* leaves the reader high and dry. ■■■

Anne Tate AIA is a principal of Abacus Architects in Boston and Marion, MA, and an associate professor at Rhode Island School of Design.



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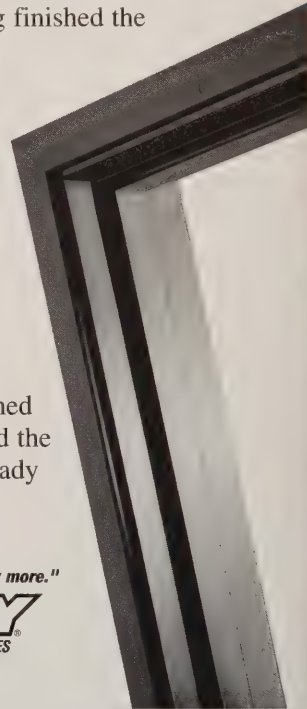
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# Site-Ations

## Web sites of note

### New England Aquarium

[www.neaq.org](http://www.neaq.org)

A remarkably rich site providing both the predictable tourist info and access to the Aquarium's impressive research and educational resources. Look for the full-text proceedings of the Aquatic Forum series, annual conferences aimed at the resolution of conflicts over coastal issues.

### International Marine Transit Association

[www.ferry.org](http://www.ferry.org)

Did you know more passengers are ferried each year than are carried on the airliners of the world?

### Massachusetts Port Authority

[www.massport.com](http://www.massport.com)

Data about our port economy plus scroll-bar reports on conditions at Logan Airport during inclement weather.

### The Lobster Conservancy

[www.lobsters.org](http://www.lobsters.org)

An impressive non-profit "dedicated to protecting and preserving the American lobster and the traditional trap fishery...through scientific research and public education."

### Coalition for a Better Waterfront

[www.betterwaterfront.com](http://www.betterwaterfront.com)

Community activism Hoboken-style. Shows what a little self-help can do.

### The Waterfront Center

[www.waterfrontcenter.org](http://www.waterfrontcenter.org)

Includes information on conferences and publications by this well-known non-profit based in Washington, DC. (See p. 46)

### Island Institute

[www.islandinstitute.org](http://www.islandinstitute.org)

A non-profit providing services to Maine's 14 year-round islands. Web links, publications, and a nifty stamp program: Buy stamps from endangered island post offices to boost local revenues so the USPS won't shut them down.

### Northeast Fisheries Science Center

[www.wh.whoi.edu](http://www.wh.whoi.edu)

A fascinating cornucopia of resources from the Woods Hole laboratory: full-text papers (look for "Social and Cultural Aspects of the Northeast Groundfish Fishery"), "Fish FAQ's," downloadable historic photos, summer job opportunities, shark research, latest whale sightings, and more.

Found any good Web sites addressing architectural practice and technology issues? Send your candidates for our Summer issue to: [architectureboston@architects.org](mailto:architectureboston@architects.org)



## Rowes Wharf



Photo © Steve Rosenthal

*Circumambulate the city of a dreamy Sabbath afternoon.... What do you see? Posted like silent sentinels all around the town, stand thousands upon thousands of mortal men fixed in ocean reveries.... But look! Here come more crowds, pacing straight for the water, and seemingly bound for a dive. Strange! Nothing will content them but the extremest limit of the land... They must get just as nigh the water as they possibly can without falling. And there they stand—miles of them—leagues. Inlanders all, they come from lanes and alleys, streets and avenues—north, east, south, and west. Yet here they all unite.*

Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*

Rowes Wharf seemed oddly desolate for the day after Thanksgiving. I'd come on foot through the early Christmas shopping crowds of Washington and Bromfield streets, and I expected to find more than the few ferry passengers I saw waiting at the terminal or the odd tourist looking out across Fort Point Channel to Boston Harbor.

Aided by the bronze relief map on Atlantic Avenue, I walked under the ornate arch of Foster's Court, the center of this complex of condos, offices, and hotel rooms. Tentatively searching for access, I found the marble-encased foyers of the commercial buildings and the lobby of the Boston Harbor Hotel, whose walls are hung with maps and charts reminding us of a bygone waterfront. The "Wharf Room," which offers banquet and meeting space on one of the adjacent finger piers, revealed another view of the harbor and Fan Pier. Farther out, a little glass pavilion jutted into the water, with no apparent use except to frame more harbor views.

With my back to the harbor, I looked again toward Foster's Court (named as though a doge's palace) and through its imperial arch to the buildings of the Financial District reflecting what small sun was available that blustery afternoon. Perhaps it was the muted light or the scale of the elaborate structure, but for a moment I couldn't get my bearings. Was I really in Boston? I'd been in San Francisco the week before, where the downtown area around Market Street and Embarcadero Center reminded me of Boston. Now Boston reminded me of San Francisco.

Writer Robert Kaplan believes that "the cities of the future seem likely to consist of the same borrowed fragments: standardized corporate fortresses, privately guarded housing developments, Disneyfied tourist bubbles, restaurants serving the same generic food." And this is what I fear that Boston will become, manifested both in Rowes Wharf and in the future development of its waterfront. What seemed innovative yesterday may be tomorrow's banality.

A nearly hidden sign revealed that Foster's Rotunda was open to the public five days a week between 9 A.M. and 4 P.M. An elevator took me to the deserted observatory—yet another space designed for the sole purpose of looking at the sea, and during business hours at that. At such a remove from the harbor, I wondered what would have become of Melville's "silent sentinels" in such a place. Would those sea-gazers "pacing straight for the water" still feel the magnetic pull of the sea as I have felt it all my life in Gloucester? Or would they come merely to patronize the restaurants and boutiques that will inevitably line a waterfront that once bustled with maritime activity?

The sea once dominated our imaginations. Like Melville's Sabbath afternoon walkers, we were mesmerized by its power and by those who once went down to it in ships. In taming and rationalizing our waterfronts, through an architecture that is more imposing than functional, we have also trivialized our maritime past.

Today's commercial centers are no longer waterfronts, but places like Washington and Bromfield streets. Today's crowds pace straight for the malls, seemingly bound for a dive. Today's silent sentinels are the mallrats hanging out at the Gap. Will they ultimately be led to the water by some residual memory, a sense of some lost part of ourselves, calling out from amid the faux piers of luxury condos and marinas? ■■■

Peter Anastas is a Gloucester writer and social worker. He is the author of *Glooskap's Children: Encounters with the Penobscot Indians of Maine* (Beacon Press) and co-author of *When Gloucester was Gloucester: Toward an Oral History of the City*.

Editor's Note: Rowes Wharf was designed by Adrian Smith FAIA of Skidmore Owings & Merrill.



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**One of the pleasures** of editing *ArchitectureBoston* is what I've come to think of as the Cracker Jack moment — finding a surprise among all the crunchy nuggets and chewy bits in each issue. The surprise is an unintended subtheme, an unexpected leitmotif that runs through the stories. These Cracker Jack moments are a curious phenomenon, one that perhaps grows out of the nature of this magazine. Our contributors are leaders in their fields, people who are attuned to changes in the ether. Their collective thoughts tend to reflect new ways of looking at familiar ideas and concerns.

Ostensibly focusing on "Practice and Technology," this issue is no different. Its Cracker Jack surprise is "adaptation." Adaptation is not an unknown concept in business discussions, but it most frequently suggests lemming-like behavior, a coercive get-with-the-program push toward the latest fad. Emerging in these pages is a more sophisticated definition — the thoughtful consideration of impending change and the careful selection of opportunities and tools that not only ensure survival, but also improve the quality of our lives, both professional and personal. This definition implies a degree of self-knowledge and self-confidence; it assumes the ability to reject certain choices, even when they represent mainstream consensus; it suggests intellectual agility and innovation.

These skills are perhaps most obvious in our roundtable discussion with small-firm principals — all dedicated pragmatists who demonstrate admirable agility in shaping their practices, in embracing and sometimes even rejecting new technologies, and in cultivating work lives that fit personal ideals and goals. In "The Large Firm Artistically Considered," Ed Frenette describes the extremes of adaptive behavior, from firms that have indiscriminately adopted corporate business structures to those that are crafting new structures that better fit the practice of architecture. In "CAD: DOA @ Y2K?" Bill Mitchell reports on new technologies — themselves adapted to the building industry — that will present new opportunities and yet more tools. Tito Harkness offers an example of thoughtful consideration of impending change — the widely accepted transition to "performance" codes — and warns of unintended consequences in liability litigation. Successful adaptation has a personal face, too. "Two Views" features perspectivist Steve Oles and photographer Steve Rosenthal, both of whom found "alternative careers" in architecture before the concept became fashionable. And in "Other Voices," John Campbell demonstrates the key to successful adaptation: self-knowledge.

This is the first anniversary issue of *ArchitectureBoston*, which from its beginning has aimed for this same agility and innovative thought. Your response has been wonderfully enthusiastic and enormously gratifying. We look forward to your continued comments and suggestions as we grow — and adapt.

Elizabeth S. Padjen FAIA  
Editor

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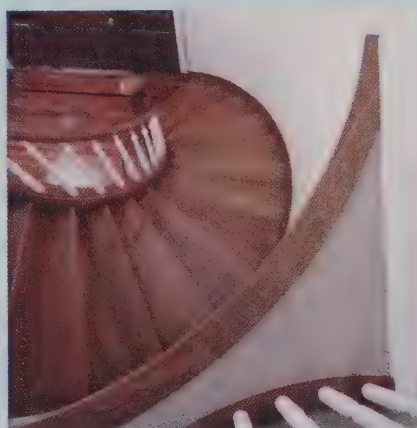
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*ArchitectureBoston*  
is published quarterly  
by the Boston Society  
of Architects/AIA.  
Editorial offices:  
52 Broad Street  
Boston, MA 02109  
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Subscriptions for all others is  
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ISSN 1099-6346

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# Letters

THANK YOU for your wonderful "Waterfronts" issue [Spring 1999]. It's inspiring to read about the transformation of harbors and waterfronts from former industrial and maritime shipping uses into vibrant new economic and social centers.

One exciting aspect of renewed interest in waterfronts is the possibility of reconnecting inland and coastal cities, and of reconnecting inland cities to their riverfronts. Right next to Boston, the cities of Malden, Medford, and Everett have committed \$2.5 million in planning TeleCom City, a 200-acre site along the Malden River.

In my own city of Somerville, the Mystic View Site Task Force is leading citizens in developing a new vision for a 140-acre site along the Mystic River. Few people realize Somerville even has a waterfront, let alone one with an existing infrastructure that includes the Orange line [public transit], commuter rail, I-92, and the Mystic waterway.

The Task Force was formed after seeing a slide show called "Imagining Somerville," by the BSA's Anne Tate. One achievement so far is to refocus attention on the ignored riverfront — with its environmental, recreational, visual, and economic opportunities — by referring to the area as "Mystic View" rather than "Assembly Square," a name that has limited the city's vision to the current shopping mall and previous industrial uses. With the dedicated involvement of many design professionals, including John Rossi of your own editorial board, we are creating "visual idea starters" and bringing citizens together in small group discussions leading to a community-wide meeting.

We might well take inspiration from Antonio Di Mambro's article on "Boston's Overlooked Waterfronts," especially when he urges us to *imagine* new visions for that waterfront. Now, just expand your vision west to the Somerville frontier, and join us — by water!

Patricia Jehlen, State Representative  
Somerville, MA ■■■

**BRAVO** on your recent "Waterfronts" issue! We Bostonians are just beginning to understand the challenges and rewards presented to us by our waterfront at the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st century. Antonio Di Mambro's piece ["Boston's Overlooked Waterfronts"] is a clarion call for cooperative regional planning in regard to the harbor and the harbor edge. Much energy has been devoted to articulating the obstacles to such regional planning. It is time that we devote our considerable intellectual capital to making it happen. The Seaport district should be the first of many initiatives that make a vital connection to the regional context.

Interestingly, the common thread in each of the articles was a more personal, emotional connection of the individual and community to the water. The historical accounts and future projections all included one thing: the desire for access. John Stilgoe's reference to the olfactory link to the sea is one to which all Bostonians can relate. If the wind is just right, one can be standing in the canyons of the financial district, visually and physically separated from the water, and still be reminded that Boston is a port city. But this fleeting



experience is not enough. Physical and visual access is required to fulfill our desires, even if we were not born by the water, never worked on a fishing boat, or never labored as a longshoreman.

This desire for access co-exists with a desire for character-giving authenticity, reflected in the current debate over the future of the Old Northern Avenue Bridge. The importance of retaining the bridge, and its story of Boston's working past, is the role it can play for current and future generations whose lives will not include the presence of waterfront industries. In order to retain meaning in contemporary and future society, as Kevin Lynch said, resources must be put into a continuous cycle of use. Their meanings for each generation will evolve, but they must remain in place in order to play this role.

There is a pervasive hesitancy to plan for our waterfronts, given that the pace of technology and societal change will occur at exponential rates. We in the design and building industry should not fear. Rather, we should stay focused on planning and design for the constant — the human condition. Our comfort with human scale, our desire for beauty, and our ancient, visceral yearning for the restorative grandeur and possibilities of the sea should guide our visioning.

Constance Bodurow AICP, Assoc. AIA  
Boston ■■■

**WHAT IS THIS NEW ARCHITECTURE** that our evolving urban waterfronts demand? The challenge for our design community runs from front to back of your estimable and provocative "Waterfronts" issue. A lot of thinking is starting to come together in Boston's Seaport District:

**Multi-use.** We need some new buzz-word for that kind of spatial cohabitation that energizes waterfronts. "Mixed-use" was market driven. But market forces on the waterfront tend to push out life-giving, genuinely water-dependent uses as well as public benefits. New building types may be most successful when they foster the confluence, rather than the segregation, of real working uses with public access.

**Scale.** The existing district street grid is to be extended, not because it's already there, but because it produces that most Boston of characteristics, a walkable city. Even now, there are good examples of ways to protect this scale, such as the Fan Pier proposal which locates the scale-busting hotel ballroom underground. We need to find more ways to keep contemporary space demands from overwhelming an urbanistically desirable block size.

**Materials.** Let's be brave. Even good contextualism doesn't demand that everything be covered in brick-sauce with granite chunks for decoration. The new Federal Courthouse may have been forced to look backward in its reliance on 19th-century brick forms. The better cue is in its conoid waterside sheet of glass. And what happened to metal siding — a good industrial material which got sophistication a long time ago?

**Form.** Seek the new shapes, rhythms, structure, fenestration for a new age. Carry Ada Louise Huxtable's crusade against the ersatz to the stage-set lobster shack and gift "chandlery" as well. Boston used up its ration of brick warehouses with the Long Wharf Hotel.

**Public Review.** The public review process can sometimes stop really bad architecture, but it can never guarantee good architecture. We can, however, provide an environment where the best is encouraged rather than watered down to satisfy a mundane common sensibility. Keep the pressure on for remarkable design.

The design community needs to get crackin'. The design education of the body politic begins with examples: We have to show what can be done — in commissions, competitions, exhibitions. If it's public policy that's to control the built destiny of our city, we design citizens had better get busy and help to mold it.

Todd Lee FAIA  
Boston ■■■

**I READ EVERY WORD** of the "Waterfronts" issue of *ArchitectureBoston* and when I'd finished, I was so upset by the man-centered, anti-environment attitude of your contributors, I tore up a perfectly good copy of one of my books in order to prepare this response for you.

As you know, there is no place on earth as valuable as the water's edge. It is the breeding ground for life on earth. Look, here's a photo I took of Boston Harbor back in 1601 **1**. It had looked exactly like that for the previous 50,000 years. This next picture **2** shows the way it looks today. Every inch of the water's edge is dead. No longer are there warm, shallow, nutrient-rich tidal marshes. For miles and miles the salt-water edges of Boston have all been paved, docked, wharfed, bulkheaded, and architected.

In your editorial you asked, "What is an appropriate architecture for the water's edge?" and of course the only answer is that there is none. The only ways to build are: 1. well back from the living edge of the sea; or 2. in the deeper water beyond the living edge.

Regardless of all that, world-famous architects as well as hack designers seem to treat water as if it were the enemy. Why? Do they hate wetlands? Do they see nothing miraculous about what happens where land and water meet? Apparently not. In any case, they see the human use as more important. We have for so long used water as both a dump and a real-estate feature it seldom occurs to us that it has higher uses.

The only structure I've ever found that even comes close to respecting the water's edge is this little earth-covered bridge **3** at the Philadelphia sewage treatment plant.

It ain't much, but compared with every other waterfront structure, no matter how elegant, it stands head and shoulders above the crowd.

Malcolm Wells  
Brewster, MA ■■■

Letters may be e-mailed to [architectureboston@architects.org](mailto:architectureboston@architects.org) or sent to: ArchitectureBoston, 52 Broad Street, Boston, MA 02109-4301.

Letters may be edited for clarity and length and must include your name, address, and daytime telephone. Please submit letters intended for publication in our Fall issue by June 21, 1999.



**1**



**2**



**3**



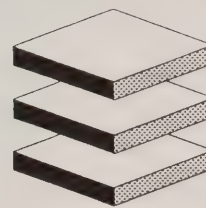
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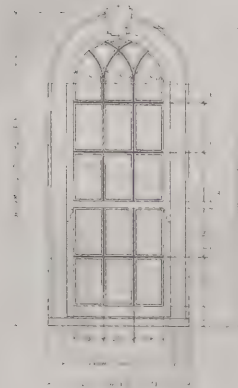
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# Size Matters

## Small firms, big business

**In matters of office size,** many small-firm architects believe that less is more — more independence, more flexibility, more personal and professional satisfaction. Small firms, which we have defined here as any office with fewer than 10 people, represent the majority of practitioners in this country. Many, including our roundtable participants, have developed surprisingly diverse project lists including schools, hospitals, banks, city halls, fire stations, restaurants, and corporate buildings — as well as the more expected residential work. Some of Boston's leading practitioners met recently to talk about the rewards and frustrations of the small firm.

### Participants:

**John Freeman AIA, of Platt Anderson Freeman Associated Architects in Cambridge, MA, is past chair of the BSA Small Firms Committee.**

**Ann Gleason AIA, of The Gleason Partnership in Boston, is the BSA Commissioner of Technology.**

**Keith Moskow AIA is the principal of Keith G. Moskow Architects in Boston.**

**Frederick Noyes AIA, of Modigliani/Noyes Architects in Boston, is chairman of the Boston Architectural Center.**

**Elizabeth Padjen FAIA is the editor of ArchitectureBoston.**

**Deborah Pierce AIA, of Pierce Lamb Architects in West Newton, MA, chairs the BSA Small Firms Committee.**

**Gary Wolf AIA is the principal of Gary Wolf Architects, Inc. in Boston.**



Photo courtesy Keith G. Moskow Architects



**PADJEN** Why have you all chosen to work within the small firm environment? Is it a mindset, a personality trait? Is it what happens to you by default because of the vagaries of the economy? Or is it just a springboard to future growth?

**FREEMAN** I think this is the best way to practice architecture. Like most of us, I've spent time in big offices, but I chose to be in a small firm. People in small firms tend to be entrepreneurial in spirit.

**NOYES** When you're small, you can make sure that nothing goes out that isn't top quality. The definition I would give to a small firm is one just below that threshold where you need a subset of layering within the personnel.

**PIERCE** I agree — we don't have levels of intermediate staff who may not be qualified to speak authoritatively, who may not be aware of all aspects of a project. We have the technical experience and always keep the client's needs in mind. I think that a small firm is really the best way to realize that expertise.

**GLEASON** A common perception is that small is something that happens to you by default. And yet for most of us here, it's something that's happened by choice. I could never consider being tied down to specific hours and being told what to do. I like the notion of being the person who's in direct contact with the client, with what's going on in the job. There's a certain efficiency in it. I don't want to manage people.

**WOLF** There's also a certain level of satisfaction in a small firm. In a large firm, you have somebody who's the manager, and you have somebody else who's the project designer, and you might have somebody else who's meeting with the clients, and somebody else who's handling construction administration. They're very specialized roles. For a lot of people, that's exactly the place to be — you know what you're doing every day. But for some people, that kind of pigeonholing is frustrating. In a small firm, you're doing a little bit of everything — you're involved with the client, with the building inspector, with the technical aspects, with design. Now, having said that, I should say I'm not sure I want to spend the rest of my life in a small firm. I've been doing it for 12 years, and I feel some of the limitations now.

**PADJEN** What are those limitations?

**WOLF** The size of projects, the type of projects. We've won some larger projects, competing against big firms. But it's very difficult for a small firm, especially in the metropolitan Boston area. It may be different in St. Louis or Cincinnati, but in Boston, where there are so many well-established, excellent, large firms who are ready to go after small projects, it's tough for a small firm if you want larger projects. We probably level off at a \$2 million construction cost, with some exceptions. To consistently land anything larger than that, we'd have to be bigger.

**GLEASON** But you can always collaborate with other architects and consultants on specific aspects of a larger project. Most of our work falls within that \$2 to \$2.5 million maximum, too. But there have been times when we've been a consulting architect with other small firms and have done considerably larger projects.

**WOLF** We haven't collaborated with other offices, but we could. I think it's important for a small practice to invest as much of the fee as possible in the firm. For instance, we find ways to work with our consultants to keep the scope of their work as limited as possible in order to maximize the amount of the fee that is going to the firm, as opposed to going out the door to consultants.

**MOSKOW** I see our current eight-person firm as a steppingstone to a larger firm with larger projects. We've tried teaming with a bigger office. But when the client looked at us closely, they saw that it was a recently made team, and so it didn't work. Personally, I would like to have the flexibility as head of a larger practice to design and build larger projects.

**FREEMAN** We probably have a \$10 million upper limit for what we can do on our own, although our work certainly averages closer to a \$1 million range. What everybody says about technology extending your reach is absolutely true for us. With just six people, we're doing projects that would have required a staff of 12 or 15, just 15 years ago.



**When you're small, you can make sure that nothing goes out that isn't top quality.**

Frederick Noyes AIA





**We have what's sometimes called a virtual office — a network of peers who may be in other offices who can sometimes fill the role of a partner.**

Deborah Pierce AIA

#### PADJEN

When do you make a decision to grow by taking on a partner? Some of you have ready-made partners — Ann works with her spouse. Some of you have had to find partners.

#### NOYES

I didn't mean to have a partnership — it just happened. Sergio [Sergio Modigliani] called me about sharing office space. And eventually we merged our practices. There is more strength in the kind of partnership we have — we each have zones of expertise and responsibility, so we're not stepping on each other's toes, and yet we back each other up. And there's feedback and discussion, which I find very positive.

#### FREEMAN

I've thought a lot about this question. As you all know, my partner [Tony Platt FAIA] passed away in December. I had two partners, now I have one. Tony and Tim [Tim Anderson FAIA] and I were really great partners, and what made it work so well is that we had very similar ethics and very complementary but different skills and interests. We started working together because of that, and then we became friends. Each of us had skills that the others would like to have, and we were able to help each other out. It made a complete package, and we were very successful. Some people work well with friends or spouses, but I would have to find someone who first met those requirements.

#### PADJEN

Each of you in effect fulfilled a certain job description?

#### FREEMAN

It's a bit more subtle than that. It was, even within a project, a collaborative way of doing things — the exposure to different thinking and different interests within a project. Tony loved writing specs. I'll never understand that.

#### PIERCE

I've been in both situations, in a partnership and on my own. They both have their advantages and their disadvantages, but I don't know that one is better than the other. I think the disadvantage of being the sole proprietor or sole principal of a small firm is that you have to be everything. It's difficult to do everything well all the time. And sometimes it's better to share some of the trials and tribulations with a partner.

#### PADJEN

How would you evaluate a potential partner?

#### PIERCE

The best way is to work with a potential partner, to find a couple of things that you can do together — it will either grow into a partnership or it won't.



**We're a husband-wife team. I don't know how we do it. We do have an ethical agreement on how things are to be done. And we're usually too busy to get into arguments.**

Ann Gleason AIA

#### FREEMAN

A partner is in many ways like a spouse, and living together first is probably good advice. It's important to see if you really do collaborate well. To me, that's what makes it a real partnership — knowing that you can kick ideas around on an equal basis. It's never been the same with an employee, because there's always a different kind of dynamic.

#### GLEASON

Rick [Frederick Gleason AIA] and I work well together as partners. A lot of people ask how we do it, because we're a husband-wife team. I don't know how we do it. We do have an ethical agreement on how things are to be done. And we're usually too busy to get into arguments.

#### PIERCE

We have what's sometimes called a virtual office — a network of peers who may be in other offices who can sometimes fill the role of a partner. If, for example, I'm going after a larger project that's specialized, I'll consult with an engineer who'll come with me to an interview. Sometimes it helps if somebody else is there on my side of the table — we each can listen while the other is presenting and focus on what the client is really asking.

#### WOLF

I think there are certain types of clients who would rather be dealing with a more corporate architecture firm, and having partners or associates can give you credibility in those cases.



**PADJEN** When you think about the possibility of expanding your firm, Gary, what is the model that you imagine? Do you take on staff and eventually find another partner? Do you merge with someone? Or do you sell out and throw in with a big firm?

**WOLF** Any of the above. If we got very busy and grew, there would be the possibility of more senior employees and/or partners. But I do agree with John that a senior employee is usually still an employee and doesn't carry the same responsibility or perhaps bring the same entrepreneurial spirit to the firm that a partner does. It's hard to plan, because so much depends on the workload. We're all busy right now. When you're busy, you don't have time for exploring these kinds of alternatives. And then when you're not busy and there's no work, you're marketing all the time, and the prospects seem less compelling.

**PADJEN** Do you think small firms are more susceptible to a certain passivity, that they tend to be reactive? Do you have time for strategic thinking?

**WOLF** We try to do our marketing at a more conscious level, but I find it a challenge to implement or think seriously about strategies or business plans, because the future is so unpredictable.

**FREEMAN** That's something we all struggle with. Marketing and business are the stress elements.

**NOYES** It's also hard for a small firm to plan its course because of the pigeonholing factor. The public tends to think that small firms only do residential work. But even if you do other work, you get labeled — "they do schools." For a small firm, gaining a new expertise or breaking into a new building type is something you have to think about continually.

**PADJEN** Yet many of you have successfully jumped into new building types. How do you do that?

**NOYES** Two ways. One is to team up with a firm that has more expertise than you do, so you learn through the coordination. And the second is to start small. In other words, a small library is not as far from residential work as a large library is, and you can learn about the building type.

**WOLF** Historic preservation, if your firm has the qualifications to do that sort of work, is another avenue, because it spans all building types. We adapted an historic building for use as a music school — we were selected on the basis of our preservation experience. But now that project is a steppingstone to more educational work.

**FREEMAN** Sometimes your reputation in a community is more important than your experience with a building type. We did a senior center — we'd never done one before — that we landed because we were known in the community, and because we proposed a building with a farmhouse feel, where we could use our residential experience. Their main concern was that it feel comfortable and familiar.

**MOSKOW** Has anyone here done public work?

**FREEMAN** We've done public projects that I'm proud of. But it's such a contorted process.

**WOLF** I think it's difficult for a small firm.

**PIERCE** The public architectural selection process is difficult to break into because it's not based on personal connection. It's based on lists of criteria that are quantitative, not qualitative.

**PADJEN** That strikes me as being counterintuitive, or at least counter to some old-fashioned advice for young firms, which suggests that if you're willing to start modestly, you can go after small public projects and build a practice based on that.

**PIERCE** You need to have a strategy about the particular types of public jobs that you're likely to get. Once you've established some credibility, they'll call you when they put together an RFP [request for proposals].

**WOLF** A lot of cities and towns rely on a very conservative set of criteria. But once in a while you end up with an architectural selection committee that knows more about the process — either because there's an architect involved or they've been through it before — and they'll establish criteria that clearly allow a small firm to compete for the job.

**PADJEN** Let's talk about the ways that small firms adapt to economic cycles. Are they more vulnerable than large firms, or do they have greater flexibility to ride out the economic doldrums?



**Sometimes your reputation in a community is more important than your experience with a building type.**

John Freeman AIA



**PIERCE** I think that small firms have a real ability to adapt in ways that large firms can't. We don't have the overhead.

**PADJEN** What did you all do in the last recession?

**MOSKOW** Moved here from California and started a new office.

**GLEASON** We'd already bought a CAD system in '86, so we just hunkered down. We were lucky enough to have one reasonably big job that kept us busy, and we've been consistently busy since then. At one point, I looked at moving into new office space and going after larger projects, partially to address my partner's concerns about our future. And I started to calculate the expenses of hiring people, looking at all the fixed overhead costs. We would have had to bring in a very big job, and I decided I didn't want to do it. We talked about it a long time, but instead we kept buying computers, and we continued to work out of a room in our house downtown. So one of the ways we've dealt with the ups and downs is by severely restricting our overhead.

**WOLF** We did that as well. The challenge, though, for a small firm as opposed to a large firm, is that you invariably end up having much closer relationships with everybody on your staff. The consequence is that it's very tough to let those people go when you hit the wall and the economy slows down. In '90 and '91, we made a serious mistake in terms of keeping people on longer than we should have, first because we thought that projects that were on the back burner were going to go ahead, and then because we felt a commitment to our employees.

**NOYES** But the plus side is exactly that — the relationships with employees that can make a firm a nice place to work.

**PIERCE** During slow times we changed our working arrangement — I told the staff we would give them a commission on any new project that they brought in.

**PADJEN** What did you learn from the recession that has affected the way you run your practice now?

**FREEMAN** If I could predict what kind of work will carry through the next recession — whether it will still be medical work this time or whatever — I would be doing that. But I don't feel anybody has that ability to predict. What we are trying to do is to diversify more and not bet it all on one or two specialties.

**MOSKOW** We have the same attitude — we're trying to do as many different types of projects as possible. Things are going to turn around at some point.

**NOYES** It also doesn't hurt to have a client who's a repeat client, somebody you have a very close relationship with, who can help carry you through the bad times.

**PIERCE** I think in terms of diversification of both client types and project types. There are obviously a lot of project types. The client types might be developers, municipalities, private companies, individuals.

**GLEASON** If you do have repeat clients whose projects are not time-sensitive as to when they will be started or completed, you can sometimes work with them to take advantage of the cycles. It can be cost-effective to build in the down-cycle. Similarly, because of the difficulty now of finding contractors and the cost of getting things done, we've told some clients they're not getting a good value and to consider putting off the work. Most of that is residential. But the other thing we do in slow times is catch up on our technology — learning new CAD programs, for example.

**FREEMAN** I have a client who is one of the senior partners in one of the large financial fund companies in Boston. He calls me up occasionally and says, "So how's work? How's business? Your friends busy? How are things going?" I said to him one day, "You know, I'm really complimented you take such an interest in us. It's really nice, it makes us feel good." He said, "Oh, that's not what it is. I think architects are on the weak edge of the economy. You're the first ones to go down when it turns." He was only partially kidding, because he's right. If the real estate economy turns, we're the ones who feel it first, because jobs start getting strung out. And early on, at the beginning of a downturn, you don't necessarily understand what's happening to you.



We're trying to do as many different types of projects as possible. Things are going to turn around at some point.

Keith Moskow AIA



**GLEASON** It does help to have an overall business plan, because the more people you're responsible for and the more fixed costs you're responsible for, the harder it is.

**FREEMAN** I think you're absolutely right. In architecture school, I'm sure I never even heard the words "business plan." But you really have to know how to run a business.

**PADJEN** What do you wish the schools had taught you?

**FREEMAN** Having just made that comment, I should say that I think that the schools should teach design or technical skills, depending upon the school. Because that's how we make our living. Business knowledge is something we need to take responsibility for, even if that means going back for classes or getting degrees. I learned my business skills from several sources, one of which was the BSA — that's one of the things the BSA is really good for.

**MOSKOW** Even if business courses had existed when I went to school, I — like many people, I suspect — would still have focused on design.

**NOYES** I think those courses ought to be available in school, and that students ought to understand that they are going out into a world where they're not necessarily going to be able to build what they're designing in school — it gets modified as the reality of the world infringes. The lack of business training reflects a certain naiveté of the profession as a whole. The fees we charge are ridiculously low for the kind of responsibility we have.

**PADJEN** What role does the small firm play in terms of providing a real-world education? Or should a young architect focus on large offices in the first years out of school?

**WOLF** Employment in a small firm is invaluable experience. I worked for a couple of years in small firms and then maybe eight years in large firms before I went out in my own. In a small firm, both the employees and the principals have to wear a lot of hats. You're exposed to all aspects of the job — you're not stuck just doing finish schedules.

**PIERCE** It should be a requirement under IDP [Intern Development Program] that you work in both a small firm and a large firm.

**WOLF** Certainly when I was doing my internship, as it's now called, it was expected that you'd spend two or three years at one firm and two or three years at another firm, and you'd eventually end up either staying somewhere or going out on your own. In the meantime, you were getting experience at different firms. And I think that's absolutely right. In fact, when I'm looking at the résumé of someone who's been at one firm for a very long time, I sometimes pause and try to figure out what the limitations might be — can they make the adjustment to do something in a different way?

**NOYES** I encourage both students and the people who work for us to do exactly what you're suggesting. They should absolutely make sure that they have seen wood-frame construction at a detailed level, because that represents the essence of so much else in construction. From there, they need to move on to make sure that they also understand steel and concrete. Then, when they're running jobs in their own firms, they've had the total breadth of experience. That means that after three years or so, it's time to move on.

**GLEASON** Working in a large firm is a very different experience. You can't work in a small firm and expect to hide.

**PIERCE** The firm principals know precisely what your productivity is, and everyone else in the office does, too.

**FREEMAN** We're rewriting our office mission statement, and one of the things that I've been considering is making it a firm where someone could have a career. The first time that came up, it scared me, because it's a huge responsibility. On the other hand, I would like our firm to be a place where some people could continue to work for a long time. One legacy that Tony left us is a commitment to hiring interns — people in school, people just out of school. He felt that it is important for us as small-firm architects to teach them. I didn't really understand that initially, but it's been very beneficial to us, because people come in with so much energy and a real passion that sometimes gets burnt out of people who have been in large firms. As you say, Ann, they're used to hiding and they're used to hierarchy. In a small firm, if something's broken, you fix it. In a big firm, you find a person to fix it.



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finish schedules.**

**Gary Wolf AIA**



**PIERCE** Hiring staff is like adoption; you really do have to make a commitment to them. There's an obligation to continue to nurture their growth and provide for them financially.

**FREEMAN** Technology has made it easier — there's more flexibility and more productivity.

**GLEASON** There's no question about it. We use DataCAD and Microstation. I can communicate more information in a shorter amount of time with less confusion.

**FREEMAN** We use AutoCAD, although we all do freehand drawings, too. But CAD is great for detailing.

**WOLF** We also use both.

**NOYES** We use ArchiCAD, but I also try to get people off the machines, so that they have a better feeling for what it is to actually make a model as opposed to flipping lines around on a screen. There are times when it is counterproductive to use the machine.

**PIERCE** We did two projects on DataCAD, and we lost our shirts. The projects that we do are all so different from one another that there is seldom a detail that I draw the same over and over again. I'm just not interested in computers. I've actually forgotten how to use DataCAD, because I wasn't using it regularly.

**PADJEN** I wonder how many small firms are not using CAD.

**PIERCE** We asked that question in a meeting of the small firms committee about a year ago. There were 20 of us sitting around, and about a third to a half said they were not using it. If I knew a project might benefit from it, I'd have more incentive to learn it.

**GLEASON** I think your point's very valid. Some people draw with hands, and some people draw with computers. CAD isn't necessarily a time-saver. It still takes the same amount of time to think about a project and to draw it the first time. It takes an immense amount of time to continually upgrade and keep computers running. You have to have someone who's technically inclined, and it becomes part of your overhead.

**FREEMAN** We've found that it gives us more design time. We can look at more alternatives. I don't use it for "library" details and repetitive elements — I think that was something of a red herring when CAD was first introduced. But there are lots of firms that are very successful without it.

**PADJEN** How does CAD, or lack of CAD, affect the ability of small firms to compete with larger firms? Is there a demand for it from clients?

**PIERCE** Sometimes clients ask if I have it and I say no. I explain that the drawings are an instrument of service, and the information will be there. For 10 years, I've been thinking that some day someone's going to demand it, but that hasn't happened.

**GLEASON** I don't think you should worry about that. It's had a very short life as a marketing tool. It's mostly public sector and maybe some institutional clients that really demand it.

**FREEMAN** Clients worry more about other things. Every client interviewing a large firm worries that the people they're meeting might not be the people they're going to work with. We can come in and say, "This is the team." Large firms represent the status quo. And so what we try to do is provide an alternative.

**WOLF** The other advantage we have is the ability to say quite honestly how exciting and meaningful a project is to us. Because there's no way that a project has any kind of consequence for a 50-person firm comparable to the consequence it has for a small firm. Projects in small offices tend to take on a different life. I was in a large firm where we were working on \$20 million projects that would be years in production because they went on hold for fundraising, permitting and many other factors. It was a culture shock to go into my own firm. In the first year we had eight projects that went through design and into construction. It's immediate gratification. That's a very rewarding aspect of the small firm — the ability to do a project quickly, see it built quickly, and feel as though you really are doing something significant in your day-to-day work. ■■■



Some people draw with hands, and some people draw with computers. CAD isn't necessarily a time-saver. It still takes the same amount of time to think about a project and to draw it the first time.

Ann Gleason AIA



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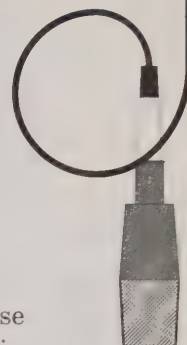
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# The Large Firm Artistically Considered

Effects of corporate culture on design quality and innovation

by Edward R. Frenette AIA

**We still measure** contemporary architecture by the work of a few widely admired individuals — those architects with the celebrity to which their colleagues aspire. Although these architects garner a significant share of publicity, a more prosaic entity — the large architectural firm with a staff of 50 or more — now produces the vast majority of our built environment. Large firms wield considerable influence, and their mastery of complex technologies allows them to monopolize important and highly visible commissions. While the average firm nationally still numbers around six people, the large firm today receives the majority of client dollars and makes the greatest impact on the skyline of major American cities. During the 1980s, large firms grew at a rate many times faster than their smaller competitors, and this trend shows signs of accelerating as we near the end of the 1990s.

The organization of large design firms began to resemble that of other major American businesses in the 1960s. Architects specialized: They became marketing directors, project managers, job captains, construction managers, interior designers. Even design, once the core of all architectural practice, became a specialty within large offices, although it was still closely controlled by senior principals.

In the 1970s, two changes occurred simultaneously within many large firms that made design a more loosely controlled, less understood, middle-management specialty. Modernism and the Modernist architect both retired — and, with them, the founding design principals and clear design doctrine of many firms. Today's firm leadership comes to power having experienced a myriad of architectural and managerial theories. They've witnessed "downsizing," "rightsizing," "outsourcing," and "superpositioning," while simultaneously trying to manage the "pursuit of excellence" along Modernist, Postmodernist, New Modernist, New Urbanist or deconstructed paths. Against the backdrop of specialization within firms and the increasing dominance of large firms, little has been written about how this corporate marriage of design and business really works.

Patricia Conway, a founding partner in the architectural firm Kohn Pedersen Fox in New York and now a professor of architecture at the University of Pennsylvania, believes that corporate and creative cultures are fundamentally different and often in conflict. Corporate

Photos: Bruce DiLoreto



culture, she notes, is concerned with stability and longevity sustained by profits generated through competitive advantage over other corporations. Leadership rises slowly by demonstrating the ability to satisfy client needs, avoid risks, and cut costs. In contrast, members of creative cultures are rewarded if they transcend client needs, not simply satisfy them. Cost-cutting and schedule maintenance are seldom rewarded, and risk-taking is celebrated. In the creative culture, design leadership is ephemeral and can change swiftly from project to project.

Architects see themselves as both stewards of design tradition and as innovators in an ongoing process of functional and technological change. However, corporations accustomed to technological change often have difficulty accommodating artistic change in design. Unlike individual practices, corporations must cultivate innovation in architectural ideas; a creative culture needs to be nourished. Peter Samton FAIA, a principal of The Gruzen Partnership in New York, believes that one means to building such a culture is to create more office discussion about design and the creative process. "At Gruzen, we have two separate review hierarchies," he observes. "Regular design reviews are held by the project team. In addition, the *entire* staff is invited to critique any project during our weekly office-wide talk sessions."

Often, design quality can be improved by giving a large firm the dynamics of a smaller organization. The most common organizational strategy today evolved in the 1970s, in effect creating several small firms within a larger organization by establishing design studios organized around a principal, building type, or client group. Robert W. Hoye AIA, managing partner of TRO/ The Ritchie Organization in Boston, reports, "We've created a loosely affiliated studio practice within a large corporate practice. The studios sanction risk-taking, and this is very much in evidence. Studios within TRO have disengaged themselves from the corporate mentality and have moved more toward a creative critical practice."

Ironically, vision statements, currently the rage with corporate management, can also be an effective way to promote a creative culture. Manifestos are not new to architecture — architectural literature is replete with reports on how the masters such as Mies, Corbusier, and Wright galvanized their studios into action with simple but emphatic philosophical statements. But what *is* new is the recognition that action must be taken within large organizations to make the whole more than the sum of its parts.

Richard Friedson AIA, of HNTB in Boston, believes the creative culture within a corporate practice needs to be codified: "When faced with organizing a corporate practice, I quickly found the need for some

sort of philosophic statement about design and a problem-solving methodology. It is important for people to start out on the same road together and to move toward a common goal utilizing the same problem-solving approach." Mark Chen AIA, of The Hillier Group's New York office, concurs and points to the problems inherent in allowing all architectural thought to focus on individual projects: "It is my job as design leader to convince the younger staff that, as a large corporate practice, we will do many projects, and it is important to build on accomplishments and evolve design ideas from project to project. A large firm is stable enough to allow for the development of a design philosophy."

Designing within the diverse cultural and geographic contexts that are typical of large firm clients and implementing design through a corporate management structure also create the risk of superficial responses. For example, the very scope and range of large practices thrust their staffs into the dilemma of eclecticism which has simmered since the late 19th-century "battle of the styles." Pat Conway notes, "We are beginning to rethink the eclectic contextualism of the '70s and '80s because it has created a placelessness in design. Architecture now fits into context, but that context is all the same." Michael McKinnell FAIA, of Kallmann McKinnell & Wood in Boston, has suggested that the result for corporate practices is often architecture that is a series of "decorated diagrams." He theorizes that large firms — with their many levels of management, divisions of labor, and ranks of specialists — often produce either discordant or overly simplistic projects, or both. Such flawed results arise, McKinnell observes, because senior designers often attempt to control design teams with simple diagrams, and junior designers then vent their artistic urges by decorating their superiors' creations with extravagant details. "Where else but in a large office would you find Harvard and Yale graduates building dozens of cardboard models of 100 alternatives for trivial details?" he asks.

Conventional wisdom suggests that theory and practice are incompatible pursuits for corporate practice — incompatible, that is, for those who publish theories. Yet those architects most deeply engaged in the artistic struggle — informed by current theory and scholarship, engrossed in cultural and philosophical debate within their own firms, and carrying forward corporate artistic agendas supported by their firms' leadership — are those whose design achievement will be most recognized. Such firms will create architecture that accommodates both the needs of their clients and the creative need for innovation and growth. Sustaining the "art" of architecture within the modern practice of architecture is indeed an art unto itself. ■■■

Edward R. Frenette AIA is senior vice president for design at Symmes Maini & McKee Associates in Cambridge, MA. He is co-chair of the BSA's Design Committee and the author of numerous articles on design. This article is based upon ongoing research conducted as a Loeb Fellow at the Harvard Graduate School of Design in 1984-85 and through a recent series of BSA roundtable discussions.





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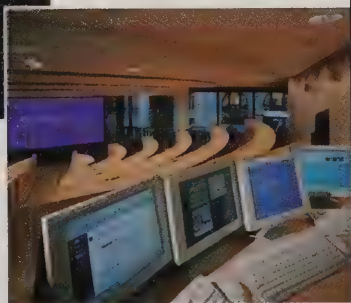
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# What Are *You* Worth?

## Putting a value on your architecture practice

by Chris M. Mellen and Patrice Riela

**What is your** architecture practice worth? This is a question that has faced owners and managers of both large and small firms for a variety of reasons: a potential sale, an imminent divorce, tax-planning, an employee stock ownership plan (ESOP), dissolution of a partnership, or stock transfers. In most of these cases, a professional business appraiser is needed to render an opinion of value, but design professionals should have a basic understanding of valuation methods in order to know when and how to hire the right appraiser. The following depicts a typical situation in which the founder of an architectural practice needs to place a value on his firm.

Ben Russo, the 60-year-old founder and sole owner of Esplanade Design Group, Inc., is planning to retire from the business he has successfully run for over 30 years. He hopes to transfer stock of Esplanade Design Group to a new generation of owners. At what price should he sell his shares of stock? What exactly is the value of his firm? Armed with answers to these questions, Ben can properly transfer shares of Esplanade Design Group at fair market value.

As he began to determine how to value his company, Ben spoke with his brother-in-law, who informed him of a few “quick-and-dirty” ways to value a firm. One possibility is to use shareholders’ equity as shown on the balance sheet. Another is to apply a multiple to the firm’s earnings, similar to a Price-to-Earnings (P/E) multiple, that is used as a barometer of value for public firms. A third is to combine the two.

However, there are major pitfalls in using such methods to value a company. Shareholders’ equity is a measure of the retained earnings and capital of a company over its lifetime. But it does not take into account certain key criteria. For example, it reflects only past earnings, as opposed to the potential future earnings power of a company. In addition, it does not consider the market’s bearing on value — what the market will be willing to pay for an established architecture firm in this region. Finally, it does not consider the intangible value of Ben’s network of clients and the goodwill he has established in the firm’s 30-year history.

The application of a P/E multiple at first seems to be a reasonable method. Buyers and sellers often make their decisions based on a multiple of earnings. However, it is unclear what multiple should be used, how accurate the earnings to which the multiple is being applied are, or whether this is a sensible way to value the business at hand. A multiple of 10 will yield a much different result than will a multiple of 5. An appraiser, with knowledge of the industry and of the numbers that go into developing that multiple (namely financial data and market values of guideline companies), must carefully determine an applicable multiple. Once a multiple is developed, it must be applied to the correct financial measure of the company being valued. For example, a P/E multiple is not applicable to cash flow. Given the pitfalls of both the shareholders’ equity method and the application of a multiplier, a combination of the two methods only combines the weaknesses of each.

Wisely, Ben did not heed his brother-in-law’s advice. Instead, he spoke to his attorney, who advised him to obtain an independent, professional business appraisal using accepted valuation standards. Valuation standards recognize three general approaches to deriving the fair market value of a company: income, market, and asset-based.

The *income approach* to value recognizes that the value of a business is derived from the company’s ability to generate earnings and cash flows. It assumes that a business is worth today what it can generate in future cash flows. This approach also recognizes that cash today is worth more than an equal amount of cash in the future and that an investor’s required returns can be estimated. Value is therefore based on methodologies using either discounted future years’ cash flows or capitalization of one year’s normalized cash flows. In both methodologies, the cash flows used to determine



the value of a company are analyzed extensively and are adjusted for non-operating and non-recurring expenses. In addition, they are analyzed to ensure that a company's current debt structure is properly reflected in its net cash flows.

In the case of Esplanade Design Group, it is important to understand its current backlog and estimated future billings. The appraiser will make an assessment regarding the industry, as well as the local and national economy, to analyze the influence these external factors will have on the company's financial projections. The booming market in the Boston region today must be considered, keeping in mind analysts' reports indicating a slow-down in construction in the next two to three years. Ben's ability to attract and retain top architects in 1999's tight labor market, as well as any capacity issues that may affect plans for growth, must also be considered. In addition, Ben must have a good handle on his overhead multiplier, as well as any future capital and debt requirements and estimated debt repayments. Given this information, the valuation expert will be in a position to begin the process of helping Ben estimate Esplanade Design Group's future cash flows.

These future cash flows must be discounted to arrive at their present value. The discount rate must account for the risk of uncertainty associated with the business operations and the receipt of these estimated cash flows. Some risks that would be considered in the company risk assessment of Ben's firm are: economic and industry conditions; the adequacy and quality of Esplanade Design Group's future cash flows, coupled with their capital resources in place to support these cash flows; the firm's client base and the nature of the industries it serves (e.g., public projects may be subject to greater budget constraints and bureaucratic delays than private projects); the depth and quality of the second generation of management; the goodwill of the company; and the heavy reliance the company has on Ben's relationships and experience. Finally, in addition to the application of the discount to future cash flows, discounts may be applicable for lack of liquidity or lack of control, as in the case of minority shareholders, depending upon the purpose of the valuation.

The *market approach* to value rests on the assumption that the value of stock in a closely held business can be determined by analysis of the price paid to acquire stock in similar, but public, companies ("guideline companies"). Valuation

multiples are based upon the relationship of financial measures (revenues or earnings) to the capital structure (debt and equity) in identified guideline companies. Indications of value can also be derived from data on the prices at which entire companies have been sold. However, the use of guideline public companies is questionable when valuing most architecture practices, because of the lack of publicly traded small-to-mid-size firms in this industry. An appraiser who understands this business will be familiar with studies that specifically value closely held architecture firms.

The *asset-based approach*, the third and final approach, bases the value of a company on the value of the underlying tangible assets; it does not include the value of goodwill and other intangible assets. Accordingly, this approach does not apply to many architecture firms, in that the value of an architecture firm lies largely within the future income-producing (or billing) capacity of its architects as well as the goodwill developed by the officers of the firm in new business development.

After a valuation is completed, many business owners are surprised to learn that their company is worth a great deal more, or sometimes a great deal less, than they had anticipated. In Ben's case, the appraiser has factored in all facets of his business, including market transactions and the effects that current trends in the industry and the economy may have on his practice. In addition to these factors, it is important to understand that every valuation contains both objective and discretionary elements that are subject to the judgment of the appraiser. A credible appraiser will make a careful evaluation of all these factors in rendering an opinion of value.



Chris M. Mellen, ASA, CBA, MBA, is the principal-in-charge of valuation services with Tofias Fleishman Shapiro & Co., P.C. in Cambridge, MA. Patrice Riela is a consultant in the firm's valuation and litigation service group. TFS, the largest regional CPA and consulting firm in southern New England, serves over 50 architectural firms. An annual "Architectural Survey" is available upon request.



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Worried that the Y2K bug will crash your office computers? If you're not careful, you may indeed have some software problems when 00 dawns. (In my time, I've coded a few two-digit date fields myself. What can I say?) But the much larger issue you will face is that the very idea of CAD, as we know it, will be DOA at Y2K. **We will be radically rethinking the role of digital technology in architectural practice, teaching, and research; those who cling too long to old ideas will be left struggling.**

The old idea of CAD is embodied in the drafting software that is now commonplace in offices and the schools. After a couple of decades of research, development, and testing in the marketplace, this sort of software effectively does its job. It's good and it's cheap. But it isn't terribly exciting.

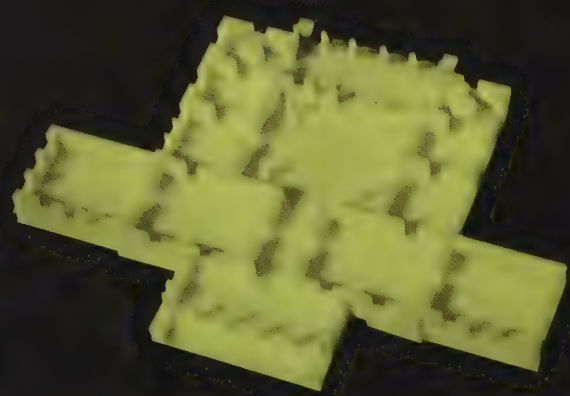
The emerging — and much more revolutionary — new idea of CAD results from the convergence of several technologies. Most of these technologies are not really new, but they are all now developing at an extraordinary pace, sometimes combining to produce truly innovative applications. Let us consider them one by one.

## CAD: DOA @ Y2K?

### Rethinking the future of computer-aided design

by William J. Mitchell

3D models of Palladio's Villa Corvara (1560). Larry Sass  
Photos courtesy MIT School of Architecture and Planning



#### 3D Digital Modeling of Buildings

Ever since the 1960s, researchers have been exploring the idea that a CAD system should maintain a 3D geometric model of a building rather than a collection of 2D plans, sections, and elevations. If this can be accomplished effectively, you can — in principle, at least — generate whatever 2D drawings you want as specialized “reports” from the 3D database, run analyses and simulations, produce physical models by means of 3D printing and milling machinery, and eliminate traditional construction documents by using the 3D model directly to drive fabrication machinery and construction robots. It is a compelling concept.



Unfortunately, however, it turned out to be very difficult to implement. Geometrically complete 3D models of buildings were huge, complex, and cumbersome. They strained the storage and processing capacities of the computers that were available to handle them. And the software to manipulate them was complex and often unreliable. In most contexts, the benefits that these digital behemoths yielded did not justify their added cost and complexity, so the much simpler technology of 2D drafting usually won out.

Today, the balance has shifted. We have a great deal more storage and processing capacity available to us, performance continues to rise and costs keep dropping, and the hardware constraints are no longer so critical. Modeling software is much more sophisticated, and software systems are both more reliable and easier to maintain and update. And most importantly, as we shall see below, you can now *do* much more with a good 3D model.

Established technologies have a great deal of inertia, so we probably will not see overnight replacement of 2D CAD drafting by 3D CAD modeling. But, as the cost/benefit ratios shift, old-style 2D CAD systems will inexorably fade into the past.

### Performance Simulation Software

For most architectural CAD users, performance simulation has mostly meant visual simulation — you build a 3D model of a project, then apply rendering software to generate shaded perspectives or

walk-throughs. Today, if we carefully exploit the most advanced visualization software, we can produce scientifically sound, truly predictive, photorealistic images of unbuilt buildings.

But we need not stop there. When airflow in and around buildings is an important design issue, for example, we can apply computational fluid dynamics (CFD) simulation software to explore the potential effects of different building configurations and systems. When auditorium acoustics concerns us, **we can simulate the way sound energy bounces around and actually listen to a simulated musical performance from a specified seat** in a proposed space. In general, we can simulate most of the complex physical phenomena that contribute to the overall performance of a

building. The implications of this are profound. In the past, architects and their consultants usually had to rely on past experience, and on crude, simplified predictive models. This introduced a lot of uncertainty and biased design processes in favor of conservative solutions that behaved in relatively predictable ways. Now, we are entering an era of sophisticated, accurate simulation, and client expectations and professional standards will rise accordingly.

### Rapid Prototyping of Physical Models

Screen displays are nice, but sometimes designers need to hold tangible physical products — drawings and scale models — in their hands. You lose a lot if you eliminate the tactile dimension of designing. **A paperless studio is about as satisfying as non-alcoholic beer.**

A printer, of course, is a machine for creating a tangible, physical product from a digital file. But it's just two-dimensional. To return tactility completely to CAD processes, we need the 3D equivalent. In our design studios at MIT, we now use a 3D "printing" device for this purpose — a fused deposition modeler (FDM). It is like a very high-precision, computer-controlled gluegun, building up beautiful, white 3D models by depositing tiny pellets of plastic in layers.

These days, there are many other such technologies. All of them currently have size, speed, reliability, and cost limitations, but they will both improve their performance and come down in cost — just as laser and inkjet printers have done. **You can look forward to the day, in the not-too-distant future, when your personal fabricator will be an inexpensive device attached to your desktop computer.**

That is just on the output side, of course. On the input side, we can use 3D digitizers to convert physical models into digital models. We can also use various 3D scanning technologies much as in modern medical imaging. And, in some of the most recent experimental systems at MIT's Media Laboratory, we can perform these operations in real time, as the physical model is manipulated, enabling designers to work directly with "smart blocks" or "intelligent clay."

It is an outdated notion, then, to think of CAD as the replacement of drawings and models by screen displays, leading to the atrophy of our tactile skills. It isn't either/or — on the contrary. The future lies in technologies for smooth translation back and forth between the tactile and digital worlds, and in close-coupling of the two to combine the advantages of both.

### CAD/CAM Construction

Today, machinery for fabrication of construction components is increasingly numerically controlled. The machinery may





form final components directly, or it may produce molds, formwork, or dies. Since it can quickly and easily be reprogrammed, it can support large-scale customization rather than older forms of repetitive mass-production.

Under this condition, it makes no sense to create shop drawings from a digital database. The sensible thing is to generate the numerical control information directly from the 3D CAD model. This is the fundamental idea of CAD/CAM — computer-aided design integrated with computer-assisted manufacturing — which has long been fundamental in the automobile, aerospace, and electronics industries, and is now becoming

increasingly important in building construction. Components can even be assembled with laser-positioning devices, numerically controlled construction robots, and the like, translating

position coordinates from the 3D CAD model.

**All this yields a radical rethinking of building geometry and construction possibilities. Curved surfaces and complex shapes become almost as easy to handle as simple planar ones.** You can economically make buildings out of non-repetitive parts, rather than repeating ones. The triumph of Frank Gehry's Bilbao Guggenheim — inconceivable without sophisticated 3D CAD modeling, digital simulation, rapid prototyping, and CAD/CAM fabrication — demonstrates that this is no longer a distant dream, but a present reality.

### High-Speed Digital Telecommunications

High-speed digital telecommunications infrastructure is now going in at a very rapid pace. With fiber links, ISDN lines, cable modems, ADSL services, terrestrial digital wireless systems, geosynchronous telecommunications satellites, and low earth orbit (LEO) satellite systems, most design professionals, in most parts of the world, will soon have access to it — at costs that seem close to "free."

### The consequent reduction in the friction of distance will motivate very significant changes in the structure of design and construction teams.

Instead of co-locating the people, reference material, computers, and software needed to accomplish a project, the emphasis will increasingly be upon electronic aggregation of the best available people and resources on a global basis. **This will produce an exceptionally tough competitive climate for architects and their consultants, fabricators, and contractors.** And it will privilege small, agile, very-high-expertise organizations that are adept at quickly finding the right collaborators and resources on the world market.

### Fast Forward

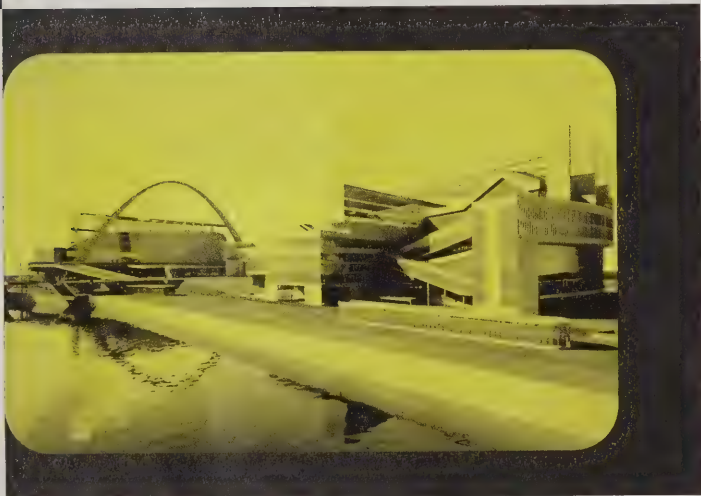
Of course, research institutions like MIT are positioned to engage these new possibilities sooner than the everyday practical world. That is their job. But we must recognize that, in today's Webbed world, the time-lags between the research frontier and the development of the first commercial products, and between initial commercialization and widespread integration into everyday practice, are shrinking.

As a result of high-speed digital connections in my home, my office, and my MIT studio, my own daily professional activities have already transformed. As I look back over my calendar for the last week or so, I see that I have electronically delivered a lecture to the University of Hong Kong (from my home, at midnight), participated in a conference round-table in Parma, Italy, given desk crits to students at the University of Virginia, participated with my MIT students in a video/Web discussion with fabricators in Portugal who will produce their chair design projects from CAD files, and judged an international design competition in which all entries were submitted in the form of Web sites.

And, of course, I e-mailed this text from my laptop, via cable modem, to my anxiously awaiting editor.



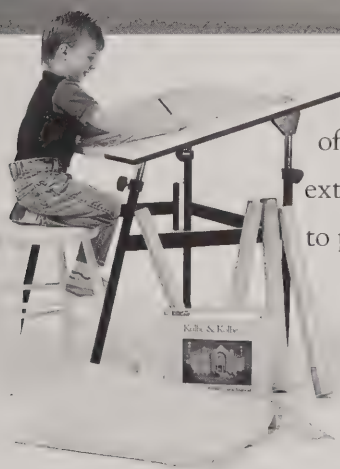
William J. Mitchell is professor of architecture and media arts and sciences and the dean of the School of Architecture and Planning at MIT. This past spring, he also served (partly electronically) as Thomas Jefferson Professor at the University of Virginia. His newest book, *E-Topia: Urban Life, Jim — But Not As We Know It*, will shortly appear from MIT Press.



Palace of the Soviets, Shinsuke Baba  
Photo courtesy MIT School of Architecture and Planning

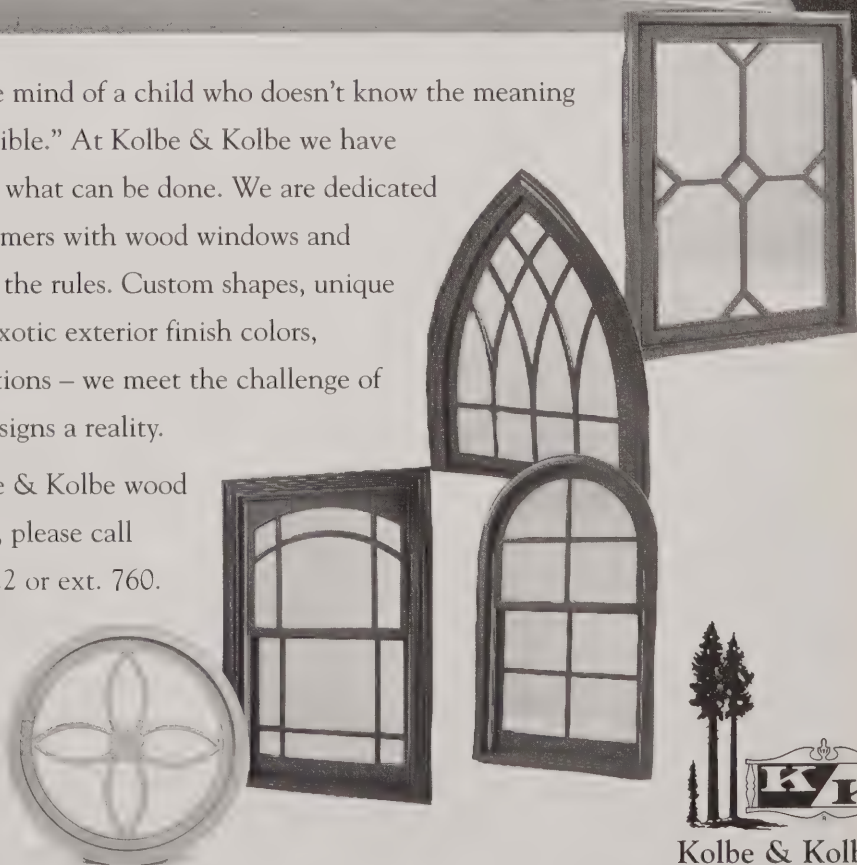


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**Carol Johnson FASLA talked recently with Maryann Thompson AIA about landscape, buildings, and the relationship of the two professions that design them.**

**Carol Johnson FASLA** (above, left) founded Carol R. Johnson Associates in Cambridge, MA, in 1959. She is the recipient of the 1998 ASLA Medal from the American Society of Landscape Architects, the most prestigious award in her field. Her work includes the site design for the Upper Charles River Reservation, the State House in Boston, Lechmere Canal Park in Cambridge, and the Mystic River Reservation.



Photo © Michael Quan

**Maryann Thompson AIA** (above, right) is a principal of Thompson and Rose Architects in Cambridge, MA, and is currently the BSA Commissioner of Design. Her work includes the Atlantic Center for the Arts in Florida and the Bartholomew County Veterans Memorial in Indiana. She earned degrees in both architecture and landscape architecture at the Harvard Graduate School of Design.

# Common Ground

**Massachusetts National Veterans Cemetery  
Bourne (Cape Cod), MA**

The cemetery's open fields, meadows, orchards, stands of native trees, fieldstone walls, and winding roads capture the imagery of the New England landscape.

All photographs courtesy Carol R. Johnson Associates, Inc.





**MT:** How can architects learn to work better with landscape architects?

**CJ:** The architects with whom we work most successfully, when the results are happy for everybody, are the architects who know the most about landscape architecture, who like to think about it but are not afraid to let us think, too. They enjoy the fusion of thinking. There are others who only think a little about landscape and are really not comfortable with other people joining in the conceptual thought process.

**MT:** Can you give an example of a good relationship?

**CJ:** There have been several architects who are very good at giving ideas and opening up opportunities, people who say, "Here's what we're doing and what do you think?" Bill Rawn is like that. Graham Gund is another — the fact that he expects quality makes him wonderful to work with. Tom Kearns at Shepley Bulfinch cheers you on — he loves to see you come up with great landscapes. And we're enjoying a wonderful relationship now working with Malcolm Holzman on the Delaware Art Museum, which has a great collection of pre-Raphaelites. We're planning a pre-Raphaelite garden outside the old, original building, and Malcolm has been very supportive. The pre-Raphaelites had such an interesting landscape concept — perhaps more literal and less "sophisticated" than we like to think we are. But it's really rather nice when flowers have meaning and represent virtues.

**MT:** How are you relating the garden to the pre-Raphaelite paintings?

**CJ:** I'm going to do it very literally. If you look at the spaces in the paintings, you see an emphasis on specific flowers and meaning. Lilies, for example, represented purity.

**MT:** So there's a symbolic value.

**CJ:** Yes. They often had water with the plants, and there's a flow to the way they looked at nature. They didn't abstract nature as something distant — they personalized it, which we wouldn't think of doing. We're offended if somebody does that.

**MT:** I'm intrigued by the idea of relating the landscape to the art.

**CJ:** Well, they were, too, and I'm very excited about trying to do it now. When I was young, I didn't think much of the pre-Raphaelites. So here it is, late in my life, that I suddenly discover this fascination. I love the way they use flowers. They never use a generic plant. They always have a specific shrub, flower, or tree, and something they're trying to express. That's what I find so great about being a landscape architect. There's a wealth of knowledge that I'm still learning about. And to go back to Malcolm Holzman and the idea of architects who encourage landscape architects — he was delighted when I got hooked on this, and he was very encouraging.





# Common Ground

## The Meandering Brook The Children's Museum Boston, MA

Designed and built as an instructional exhibit on the art and science of water, this temporary, interactive fountain-sculpture depicts the course of a natural river system.



**MT:** Is there a real dialogue that takes place in those kinds of relationships? Do you crit each other's work, for example?

**CJ:** There are some architects who like that, but very few. Architects don't like to be critiqued by landscape architects. I don't critique the architect's work unless it has a bad impact on the landscape, and then it's my responsibility to tell the architect that there's an issue. And it may be that I can manipulate the landscape so that the issue is solved.

**MT:** I've found that the advice that we get on our projects from landscape architects is invaluable, especially in terms of site planning, entry conditions, building location, even the materiality of a building.

**CJ:** Site planning and building location are fair game. But rarely does an architect want to hear from a landscape architect about building materials, so I usually don't offer any suggestions.

**MT:** I think you'd be surprised — I think you should offer suggestions. Materials have to do with the site as well — the "walls" of the site. I wonder what your view would be about requiring a landscape architecture theory course in an architect's education.

**CJ:** When I was at Harvard, everyone took the first year together — architects, landscape architects, and planners. And then as we went through the school, we had collaborative projects, where the faculties were together and the students were together. There were some architects who actually took landscape courses, and I think that's terrific. If the architect has never even heard of an aspect of landscape design that we think is important, it's not easy to communicate why we feel it is so critical. Sometimes I am surprised and find myself asking, how could they not know that? But you have degrees in both architecture and landscape architecture — how do you feel about it?

**MT:** I think it would really help the design professions if they were taught more closely together. RISD [Rhode Island School of Design] does that; it's similar to how Harvard used to be.

**CJ:** I learned a lot from the architecture students — ideas and visions that I would never have considered if I hadn't been in the same room with them.

**MT:** You've also worked with engineers on infrastructure projects — bridge design, for example — that have typically been outside the scope of architecture or landscape architecture.

Centanni Way  
East Cambridge, MA

A park for strolling and sitting in harmony with surrounding historic public structures



**CJ:** The work of engineering, like the work of architecture and the work of landscape architecture, should have a certain purity. And if that purity can be enhanced by another profession, that's great. I wouldn't ever want to be a sort of bridge decorator. But we've done a lot of work on the "touchdown" of bridges, because where they meet the landscape is a no-man's-land that the engineers don't quite know how to deal with. And so we have worked on color and street furniture and the side slopes and the way that the bridges connect out to the greater landscape.

**MT:** Do you have a philosophy about the relationship between architecture and landscape architecture that underlies all your work? Or do you take each project on its own terms?

**CJ:** I think in terms of levels — what is really important, rather important, and less important. And my philosophy is that I must insist upon the things that I think are really important. The things that I think are somewhat important I can negotiate. And the things that are less important will be solved in the best manner possible.

**MT:** Looking at your work, I sense that one of your priorities is a desire to link the inside of the building with the site. It's something I see in your work generally, an attitude toward human interaction with the landscape. Is that a fair assessment?



**CJ:** Yes, and I would add "wayfinding." Where is someone going? He's going to a building. Well, how does he perceive the building as he makes his way to it? What's his sense of the whole place he's moving through in order to enter that building? I think that's really important. And it's not just a pedestrian sense of arrival, because vehicles bring people to the buildings, too.

**MT:** Do you see the landscape architect's role changing?

**CJ:** The landscape architect's role has been changing in one sense. Olmsted did the first great separated traffic planning, Central Park, so he had a sense of roads and transportation and circulation. His partner was an architect, so he also worked very closely on the architectural expression of bridges and walls. And he worked with H.H. Richardson on many projects where the architecture and landscape architecture are completely fused. In the past, architects and landscape architects worked together very closely. So rather than calling it a change, I would say it's a challenge to achieve today what has already been achieved in the past. It's a matter of getting the best out of both professions on every project. Landscape architects did wonderful things on parkways in the '20s and '30s, and perhaps our role is less important on infrastructure projects today. But I think that we're doing a little better with urban landscape architecture, because the intensity of urban life and urban use makes it very difficult to provide amenities — you have to be more creative. When I began my practice, you would typically see perhaps a half-dozen one-inch [caliper] trees around a school that had a few parking places and a driveway and a sports field. But people expect more now. They are expecting a nicer environment, both in cities and outside of them. After World War II there was a lot of building to be done and not a lot of money to do it. Since then, Americans have traveled more, and they've seen beautiful European towns with lovely pavements and trees in cities. Now we're going back to the rich, beautiful materials and the kind of quality that was provided in earlier days. We're regaining the stature and the quality of landscape because people are interested and they expect it.

**MT:** There is another change that I can think of, having observed the profession — a return to a more ecological approach, which seemed to have lost its way in the '50s. It's a large part of your practice, isn't it?

**CJ:** It is. And it never should have been lost. Certainly Olmsted, with his practice of using native plants and understory treatment and providing flood retention and water storage, knew how to do it, but that, too, was lost after World War II.

**MT:** Does your practice include landscape ecology? It's a new focus in some of the schools, a way of looking at landscapes as broad systems that create systems of habitat.

**CJ:** Yes, but landscape architects have always done that as a normal part of practice.



**MT:** It's being identified as a new science now, addressing edge conditions and the connection of regional habitats by creating corridors for certain animals. Richard Forman is teaching it at Harvard — he really developed the science. His argument is that this is going to change the face of the profession, because people are more concerned about these issues now. So the profession will become less focused on design and more focused on ecological issues, such as the preservation of habitat.

**CJ:** He's probably right, but I don't see a terrible dichotomy. It seems to me that if you're doing good design, you're doing good ecological design. I admire Richard's work because I haven't worked on habitat corridors across a whole state. But when we're dealing with a campus area or some much smaller entity, we're still thinking in those terms.

**MT:** And you do consider habitat retention.

**CJ:** Oh, yes. Absolutely. But it's an example of how the increasing intensity of use makes things very difficult for us. We really need a little more space to do that well. Of course we do a lot of planting for birds, but everybody does that. And of course we do a lot of low-maintenance meadows, and that's very good for habitat. I think we'd be doing more if we could, but I don't think it's going to get us away from design, because that's the nature of good design. We were always trained to prevent soil erosion, to preserve unique natural qualities. But we all need to learn more about how you do it in a new, much more intensely used landscape. We were trained in an era when there was a little more room, a little more latitude, less pavement, fewer cars, and less air pollution than we have today. So now we have to learn how to do it with more constraints. But that's our job.

**MT:** You've also developed a practice that values community input and values a process of including many voices in the design. Have you established a methodology for that process? Maybe you have some advice for other designers who are interested in community input.

**CJ:** We did a lot of projects back in the days of Lyndon Johnson's Great Society, and we invented a lot of tools for community input. Some worked very well. I had display boards in a bus that was parked in the middle of the community so people could visit. We had people go door-to-door with a questionnaire. We put together a little workbook that was very successful — we included rough sketches, and people could make notes in it. But they didn't all work. Once we tried to organize a group walk along a route that we were proposing as a main pedestrian route. There were three alternatives, and we put out red, yellow, and blue ribbons to identify the different possibilities. But the kids went and switched all the ribbons around. More recently, after one of our school projects was built, my partner Randy Sorensen met with the children and took them on an ecology walk so they could see what we did and why. And we conduct workshops, although I know

everybody does workshops. Ours are a little different in that we have separate focus groups to address a particular issue, and then they come back to the meeting of the whole and report. This has been extremely successful, because there are a lot of people who won't speak up at a major public meeting. It's a format that has given us access to the thoughts of people who are a little more reticent.

**MT:** Do you find that community involvement has changed over the years? I imagine that it was higher in the '60s.

**CJ:** There's still a lot of interest. In the '60s, of course, it was part of the funding requirement for programs like the "model cities" projects. The one we were mostly involved in was Lowell. The key neighborhood in Lowell was called the Acre. There was a wonderful man there named Pat Mogen, who was the principal of the local school. Pat was the father of the Lowell National and State Park — it would never have happened without him. He was very interested in preserving the Lowell mills and felt that they were a wonderful cultural resource that shouldn't be destroyed. So he got people interested in model cities, and the Lowell planning department signed on, and they put together the Acre model neighborhood organization. The neighborhood really did all the work. They rehabbed a main park, they redid streets. There were loans for housing. They improved the schoolyard, pedestrian routes to get downtown, and several of the canals. And then Senator Kennedy got interested, and they really worked like demons to implement the idea of the cultural national park that's there now. It was strictly a grassroots effort. It was a thrill to participate in it, because I felt we were doing something revolutionary, meeting with those people, learning the history of the area and what their dreams were and what their goals were. It was high time. And that area now has changed totally. Back then, it was Syrian, Greek, French-Canadian. Puerto Rican people came afterward, and then other Spanish-speaking people. And now I think it's mostly Vietnamese and Cambodian. So it continues its history of changing populations and changing needs.

**MT:** How does that affect the process of community involvement?

**CJ:** It's an interesting question. If you are working in an area that has a lot of in-migration, how does that affect landscape architecture? Well, it certainly affects how people recreate, how communities function. I think that some of these in-migrations do want and do identify with a more symbolic American landscape. So I don't know that we need to change totally, but I think we need to be sensitive to certain kinds of relationships in landscape. But generally, I think that in any society, people enjoy open space. People enjoy getting together in places outdoors, and that is always going to be valued.



**MT:** I know that you do a lot of hiking in New Hampshire, and I wonder what inspiration you draw from nature. I read something, for example, that suggested that your idea of running water over the text at the JFK fountain [John Fitzgerald Kennedy Memorial Park, Cambridge, MA] was inspired by a waterfall in New Hampshire.

**CJ:** That particular fountain was a meeting of needs and place. The family requested that we include some of the president's speeches, but we weren't sure how they wanted them placed — if the speeches should be separate. When I was in New Hampshire, I saw water flowing over a rock, and I thought perhaps we could do both. It seems to work fairly well.

**MT:** You realized that you could see through water and could therefore read text behind it.

**CJ:** That's right. And also, I wanted the experience of arrival to recognize the larger environment. Whenever I'm out, I see things — I was out snowshoeing last weekend, and I saw a few things that I've been thinking about ever since.

**MT:** Like what?

**CJ:** Well, the white-on-white of the birch trees and the snow, and then suddenly seeing very dark trees. There's something about evergreens and birch trees that has always interested me. I've been nervous about using birches because of the breakage and their short-lived quality. But when I came into places that were protected, the impact of the birch and the evergreen was just a little different from the way I've done it before. I always thought those woods up there were rather diverse, but it was very clear that at certain elevations, there were certain tree types. And in winter you perceive that much more clearly. Of course, I realize that our friends who hate monocultures won't like to hear that.

**MT:** No, but birch trees in groves are beautiful.

**CJ:** There are some fascinating things up there. There's the auto road, for example. In winter, it's a gorgeous, snowy ribbon. We played football on the auto road on Sunday. I've thought a lot about that — how you can take something and give it another use in another season. I believe that people should celebrate the winter where they have one. And last weekend, we had a whole gang of people playing football in a beautiful, sunny, snow-covered space that in summer has nothing but automobiles going up and down. That is really something to think about. ■■■

*Editor's note: After transcribing this interview, Elissa Malcohn wrote this cover note:*

"I have always loved the JFK fountain for several reasons. One is the way in which the overflowing water breaches its stone barrier and in doing so becomes (to me) a separate entity. Another is its draw to both children and adults, who experience contact in at least two ways. The pool is accessible for those who want to take a dip in it (for me, the principle of the *mikvah*, or ritual spiritual bath and cleansing, comes to mind, like baptism)....And reaching through the water barrier to touch the speech engraved into the stone is a wonderful tactile experience, both in and of itself and in being able to truly "feel" Kennedy's words. That it is set beneath ground level makes it a kind of pseudo-cave sanctuary (particularly if I am sitting and writing in a corner of the submerged stone), and lets me observe the field from animal-eye view, where I need to reach up to feel the grass. All these elements combined make the fountain into a haven from the surrounding business of Harvard Square."

John Fitzgerald Kennedy  
Memorial Park,  
Cambridge, MA





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# Constructive Advice

## Codes, litigation, and you

by Albert (Tito) Harkness III AIA

**A change lies just over the horizon** that will have a profound legal impact on design professionals: the transition from traditional "prescriptive" codes to "performance" codes. The transition is certain — last summer, a committee of the International Code Council (ICC) published the first draft of a proposed performance code. Its final report is scheduled for publication in the year 2000, after which the ICC code will eventually take effect as an adjunct to a new national model building code.

Our current building codes have evolved mostly in response to specific events such as fires and structural failures. They are characterized by their "prescriptive" nature, which is to say that they describe and enumerate specific requirements and features, such as the number and size of egress stairs. Since the current codes have been built up in a piecemeal fashion, they speak to those issues which have attracted legislative attention, but they are silent on others. In this respect, the evolution of traditional codes is based on precedent, similar to British common law. Like common law, traditional codes are messy, because they are not based on systematic statements of basic principles.

*Statistics indicate that more deaths and injuries occur each year as a result of falls during the everyday use of buildings than from major emergencies — a fact that reveals a secondary, unintended, function of codes today: Building codes are frequently cited during civil litigation over personal injury or property damage.*

A performance code, on the other hand, is intended to increase design freedom by enabling the use of innovative materials and alternative designs. As an alternative to traditional code requirements, designers will have the option of complying with more broadly stated code criteria and objectives, such as, "Occupants shall have sufficient time to escape without being overcome by fire and smoke." The design professional will be responsible for providing analysis and computations to demonstrate compliance with the requirement.

Unlike a prescriptive code, the proposed performance code starts by stating its guiding principles. In this respect it is similar to civil law, which prevails in France and other European countries. Like the Napoleonic Code and classical Roman law, the requirements of the performance code all fit into an overriding rational framework.

Since the performance code derives from general objectives, it is at once more global and less specific than traditional prescriptive codes. The performance code will serve as a skeletal framework which is intended, according to the current draft, to "provide a reasonable level of health, safety and welfare, and to limit damage to property from events that are expected to impact buildings and structures," without telling the designer how that is to be done. This approach places a great deal more responsibility on the design professional.

The ICC committee that is writing the performance code anticipates that initially traditional codes will be used most of the time and that performance code provisions will be used only in unique circumstances requiring innovative design. However, the committee also expects that the codes will evolve until the more global performance code ultimately becomes the "umbrella" of the code structure, with the current prescriptive codes representing only one means of complying.

Most designers and code enforcement officials share the assumption that building codes exist primarily for the purpose of regulating future construction to prevent fire or structural collapse and to ensure safety should such emergencies occur. However, statistics maintained by the National Safety Council and the US Consumer Product Safety Commission indicate that more deaths and injuries occur each year as a result of falls during the everyday use of buildings than from major emergencies, a fact that reveals a secondary, unintended, function of codes today: Building codes are frequently cited during



civil litigation over personal injury or property damage. When lawyers cite the building code in such cases, they are applying the code retroactively in order to establish liability for some loss which has happened in a building.

In fact, building codes have become the preferred standard for establishing liability in litigation that involves buildings, because they are the laws which most directly spell out the duties of building owners and designers with regard to public safety. In Massachusetts, for instance, a building code violation is considered automatic evidence of negligence. An absence of code violations does not automatically prove that there was no negligence, but showing that a building complies with all applicable codes can be a powerful argument for the defense.

In this sense, traditional building codes fit well with our common law system. As an example, suppose that someone trips and falls down the stairs in a new building, is severely injured, and sues the building owner and architect. The prescriptive code in effect at the time of construction required 7" risers, 11" treads, and allowed a maximum dimensional variation of  $\frac{3}{16}$ " between adjacent treads and risers. If the defendants can demonstrate that the treads and risers where the fall occurred conform to the code and that there are no other prescriptive requirements in the code that could be cited as possible causes of the fall, they can probably defend the case successfully.

On the other hand, the proposed performance code states its requirements as general objectives and does not give specific requirements. The comparable wording of the proposed performance code is: "Means of egress shall enable reasonable use by pedestrians in the building with due regard to human biomechanics and expectation of consistency."

This wording opens up a world of possible liability theories for the plaintiff: Perhaps the designer should have foreseen that the step geometry was inappropriate for a certain class of users, or that there should have been greater visual contrast between the steps, or that the steps were not consistent with another flight of stairs in the building, which the plaintiff habitually used.

To date, most of the published commentary on performance codes has focused on structural design and fire protection issues and has emphasized the benefits of increased design flexibility. These technical areas of the code may well be compatible with a performance approach, because innovative designs can be engineered and tested objectively. However, it is hard to see how the broad wording of the performance code can be impartially applied to the more humanistic aspects of design such as egress, accessibility, and interior environment.

Eventually, any building codes we adopt are likely to be applied retroactively in litigation. If the design goals set forth in the proposed performance code eventually become the overall umbrella requirement predicted by the ICC committee, they will have the effect of significantly increasing the liability exposure of designers. ■■■

Albert (Tito) Harkness III AIA is an architect in Ipswich, MA, who writes and consults on the technical aspects of design.



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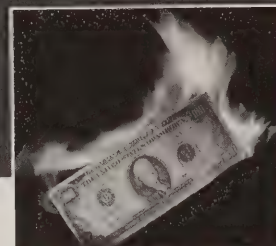
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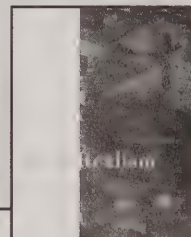
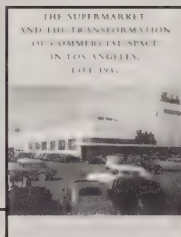
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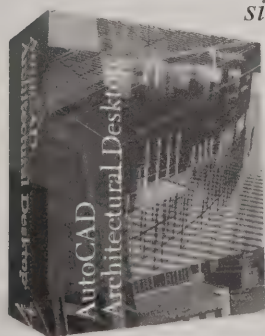


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# Two views: Before and after

Paul Stevenson Oles FAIA and  
Steve Rosenthal

**Before:**  
United States Courthouse  
(Boston) as rendered in  
1993 by Steve Oles



**After:**  
Steve Rosenthal's 1998  
photograph of the  
completed structure





**Perspectivist Steve Oles and photographer Steve Rosenthal share more than their first names, international recognition, friendship — and authorship of this essay. They met many years ago when they both worked as architects at Cambridge Seven Associates. Although their careers eventually diverged, if only slightly, they still have much in common: a degree (Yale), an award (AIA Institute Honor), a zip code (Newton), and a birthdate (September 26). Occasionally, they even share a client — in this case, Henry Cobb FAIA of Pei Cobb Freed & Partners, the designer of the United States Courthouse in Boston.**

Architecture professor David Leatherbarrow has said, “Poets make poems, painters paintings, and musicians music. Architects, however, do not make architecture; they make drawings and models of it — representations meant to direct the development of something conceived into something constructed.” Architecture, therefore, is an “allographic” art — analogous to musical composition, in which an idea is committed to notation to be played by others because the actual symphony (or building) is too extensive or complex to be performed by its conceiver alone.

Whether manually drawn, digitally generated, or photographically captured, representational images are essential to the architect at each stage in the design evolution — from conceptual sketches through developmental drawings to contract and post-construction documentation. Because the design process itself — including the creation of these several kinds of images — has become so complex and competitive over the years, today’s architect relies increasingly upon specialists for expert help in their production. This is particularly true for the graphics that communicate the architect’s design intentions to the client and public, that is, representational previsualization and post-construction depiction of the finished building. This need has spawned the ancillary professions of architectural perspectivism and architectural photography.

As both are concerned with the representation of building images, the two fields have much in common and have extensively influenced each other over the years. The very invention of photography almost two centuries ago resulted in part from an effort to produce pictures without the necessity of drawing. On the other hand, the modern-day photographic convention of eliminating vertical

convergence in a building image (perspective “correction”) is a direct legacy of drawing — in which “three-point” perspective, although more accurate, has seldom been used because of its difficulty to draw.

Hugh Ferriss, this century’s most celebrated perspectivist, wrote that an architectural rendering should be “an attempt to tell the truth about a building.” Ezra Stoller, the dean of modern architectural photography, holds that a building photograph should “show the architect’s idea.” Acknowledging that there are many avenues to show and tell the “idea” (the designer’s intention) or “truth” (the building’s essence), a convenient and authoritative proof of previsualization accuracy should be the comparison with a photograph of the constructed building, taken from the corresponding viewpoint in a similar lighting context.

As a practicing architectural perspectivist and photographer, we enjoy a close affinity and tend to share an attitude about the representation of built form, whether prospective or retrospective. While persuasive arguments can be made for highly interpretive, subjective, or stylized visualization of architecture, we each prefer to seek a more straightforward, objective, and denotative approach to representation, showing when possible the whole building in a natural lighting context from a commonly accessible viewpoint. Given the general level of “photo-literacy” of contemporary culture, an honest photographic or “photorealistic” drawn image is one which is immediately and easily understood by everyone — outside the design professions as well as within.

The two images of this building were generated five years apart by entirely different means with no direct collaboration between us. The photograph was not specifically intended as an exact match for the drawing — in fact the viewpoint, time of day, season, tide, cloud cover, foliage maturity, and even certain details of the design are somewhat inconsistent between the two images. And yet there is, we believe, a striking congruity of expression. Whereas a satisfied client may see this kind of before-and-after verification as an example of “what you see is what you get,” we like to think of it more in the philosophical terms of Louis Kahn’s poetic musing, “an end which remembers the beginning.”



**Portrait of Steve Oles  
by Steve Rosenthal**



**Portrait of Steve  
Rosenthal by Steve  
Oles**



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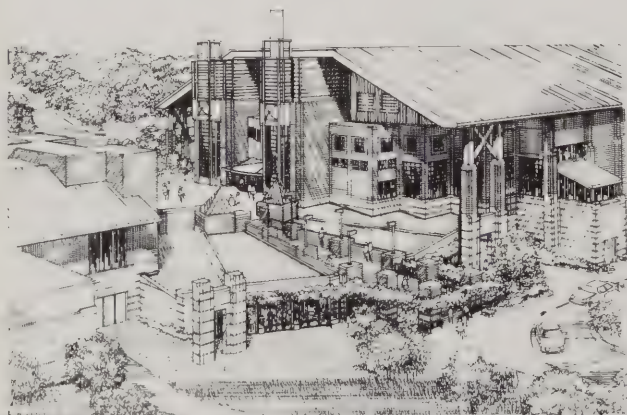


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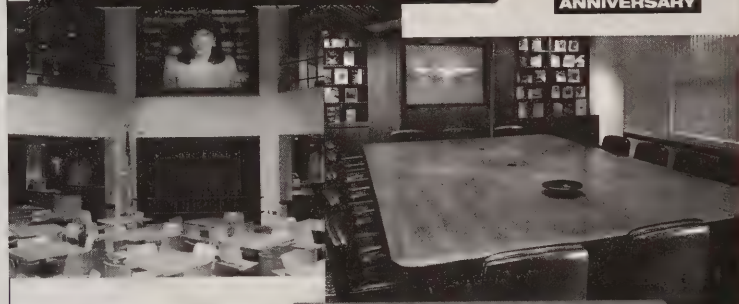
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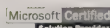
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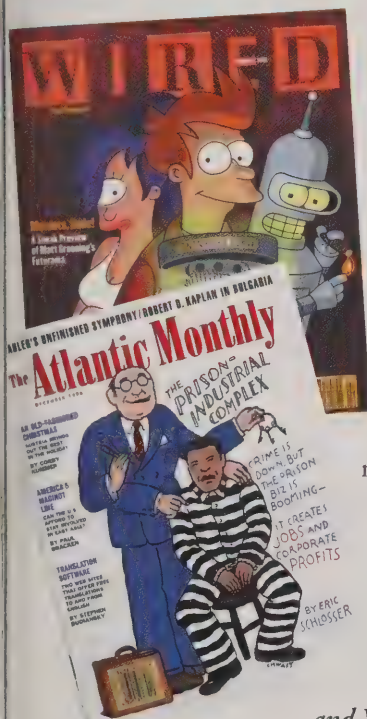
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# Covering the Issues

Periodical roundup  
by Gretchen Schneider



**Genuine fake...** “Has the malling of America created a cultural wasteland — or will we one day be nostalgic for what appalls us now?” The most provocative part of Steven Johnson’s “Theme Parking the American City” in the *Village Voice Literary Supplement* (February–March 1999) is this devil’s-advocate question posed on its cover. In his review of yet two more additions to the recent literary onslaught lamenting the rise of urban “theme parks,” Johnson questions popular assumptions of what’s real — after all, there’s nothing “authentic” about carved Corinthian capitals on a 19th-century building. For better or worse, the originals of our time are strip malls. Some day perhaps these, too, will be missed.

## Good news for home-makers!...

According to a series in the *US News and World Report* (“Fixing Up is Hard to Do,” February 15), Americans are remodeling as never before: “More than one third of all U.S. homeowners...are expected to spend a total of \$175 billion on renovations this year.” At this rate, in two years, home remodeling will outpace new construction. But the *US News* coverage is not necessarily good news for architects. According to the “Design Tips” column, “Architects give more options, but at a price” and can “give clients a false impression of what they can get for their money.” Time to sharpen our pencils and our PR if we want to cash in.

**The revolution’s over...** On the list of extinct workplace structures: typing pools, old boys’ networks...and the virtual office? So argues Warren Berger in February’s *Wired* (“Lost in Space”), in which he describes the advertising agency Chiat/Day’s failed attempt to go paperless. In 1993, owner Jay Chiat declared that the “conventional American office structure [was] antiquated and

counterproductive” and that it was time for revolutionary change. Chiat/Day’s New York and Los Angeles offices were the first to be liberated: “Chiat’s virtual pioneers [were] emancipated from cubicle bondage and mundane office protocol, with no time clocks to punch, the freedom to sleep late and say you were working at home, to write at the beach and get paid for it.” Design mags loved it. Office staff did not. The problem, it seems, is that the new workplace wasn’t only paperless, but office-, desk-, and personal space-less, too. Employees had not even a hard drive to call home; computers and telephones had to be “checked out” daily. Chiat argued that employees had private space — it just wasn’t personal space. Therein the dilemma. One employee pulled his belongings around in a Red Flyer wagon; others co-opted corners of the floor; still more took the beach option. Now, five years later, the virtual office is virtually through: the LA crowd is moving on to new digs, while New York has renovated again, this time including closed-door executive suites. We might have seen this one coming.

**Pianissimo...** Thoughtful, substantive, intelligent-yet-readable architectural criticism is sometimes found in the unlikeliest of places — this time hidden between biographies of Ulysses S. Grant and a history of medicine in the *New York Review of Books* (February 4). Martin Fuller crafts a comprehensive overview of the work of 1998 Pritzker Prize-winning Italian architect Renzo Piano who, he writes, has done “more honor to the prize than vice versa.”

**Growth industry...** Though stable through most of the century, the US prison-building rate doubled during the 1980s and again in the 1990s. Eric Schlosser rails against this recent growth in the *Atlantic Monthly* (December 1998), a companion piece of sorts to *Architectural Record*’s own December cover story on prisons. Schlosser contends it’s all part of the “prison-industrial complex” — “a set of bureaucratic, political, and economic interests that encourage increased spending on imprisonment, regardless of the actual need...a confluence of special interests that has given prison construction in the United States a seemingly unstoppable momentum.” Spending on correctional facilities has increased fivefold since 1980, spawning an entire industry complete with tradeshow, Web sites, AT&T deals, and large architectural firms. A sobering perspective. ■■■

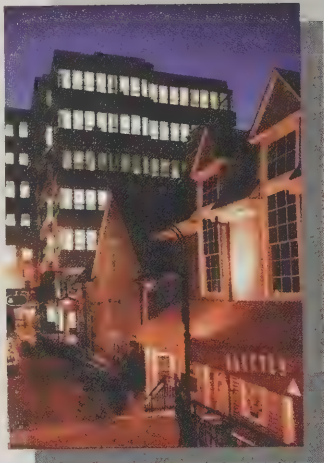
Gretchen Schneider is a designer at Bruner/Cott & Associates in Cambridge, MA, and an adjunct member of the architecture faculty at Roger Williams University.





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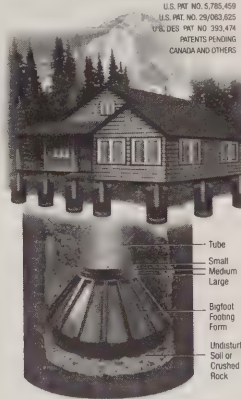
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## Books

# The Architecture of Additions: Design and Regulation

Paul Spencer Byard

W.W. Norton & Company, 1998

Reviewed by Homer Russell

How often do we find ourselves grimacing at an earnest but misguided addition to a noteworthy structure? Although building extensions have been commonplace since the first lean-to was grafted onto a hut, good additions to important buildings are rare; the Prince of Wales found a sympathetic audience when he compared a proposed addition to the National Gallery to "a monstrous carbuncle on the face of a much-loved and elegant friend."

Paul Byard, a professor of architectural preservation at Columbia University, has written an industrious new treatise that at last draws attention to this significant but understudied design challenge. The subtitle reflects the author's interest in practical regulatory issues, but Byard's more intriguing theme centers on two related questions: How does a new building addition affect the meaning of the original when they are combined, and how should they affect each other when the original is a protected structure of historic significance?

Using some 60 illustrated examples, of which half are from Western Europe and the rest from this country, Byard first identifies the high standard established by the virtuosos — Michelangelo, Bramante, Wren — where the addition is as good as the original and the combination of the two creates a third meaning as significant as that of the individual parts. He then examines 20th-century additions, which he divides into three occasionally belabored academic categories: extensions of old buildings, where an apparently discordant new wing actually continues the architectural integrity of the original (Kahn's addition to the Yale University Art Gallery); deviations, where the addition overtly credits the original as the source of its ideas and thus guarantees the original its preeminence (Polshek's addition to the Pepsi-Cola Building); and transformations, where the new sets out not necessarily to alter the old, but to restate it in a fresh way (Pei's 1993 Louvre pyramid).

Byard presents several excellent examples illustrating late 20th-century additions to 20th-century buildings, and the case studies are complex and engaging. Although many of his observations — such as his criticism of the recent addition to Kahn's Salk Institute — are insightful, a few of the examples he supports fail to meet the standard that he himself establishes at the beginning of the book. He claims that the tower placed on top of Boston's United States Custom House is compromising and uncomfortable; that James Sterling's Number One Poultry Lane in London is an improvement over the wildly eccentric but demolished original; and that Mitchell/Giurgola's Penn Mutual Life Insurance Company in Philadelphia — an example of what is commonly called a *façadectomy* or *façadectomy* — fully safeguards

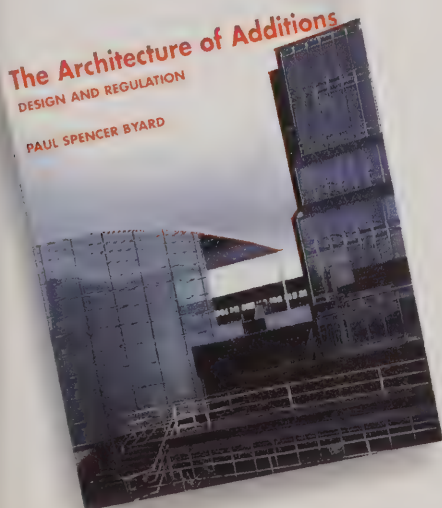
the original. Indeed, his claim that *façadectomies* can be legitimate preservation tools will probably astonish most Bostonians. During the past two decades, four of these have been executed in downtown Boston; in each case the very essence of the original building has been eviscerated and its exterior trivialized. While the remaining 19th-century *façades* lend some scale, continuity, and interest to the streetwall, and some of these projects do have merit, they can't be palmed off as honest preservation, i.e., as a successful combination of old and new works.

Byard is particularly eloquent on the origins of the nationwide preservation movement, noting that urban renewal and the concurrent spread of undeveloped lots and anonymous modern buildings weakened rather than invigorated downtowns by demolishing their most identifiable and distinctive older structures. The middle of the book is devoted to a lengthy discussion of the emergence and application of New York City's stringent preservation regulations, which were triggered by the leveling of Penn Station in 1962; Byard credits Boston with having equally ambitious restrictions.

Boston is fortunate to have a strong collection of successful additions, many of which are in highly regulated historic districts: Paul Rudolph's post-fire, partial replacement of the First and Second Churches; Graham Gund's Church Court; Frank Gehry's Tower Records; Schwartz/Silver's enlargement of the New England Aquarium, to name but a few. Perhaps the most provocative is Kallmann McKinnell & Wood's Boston Five Cents Savings Bank addition, now Borders Books, on the corner of Washington and School streets. These structures are all testimony to the fact that with a talented architect, a sympathetic owner, and the fair application of consistent and flexible rules, almost anything is possible.

For an architect about to design an addition, an owner or developer thinking about building one, members of design review commissions, or anyone interested in the ways buildings change over time, *The Architecture of Additions* is a valuable reference guaranteed to both inform and inflame animated, constructive debate and to improve the quality of these elusive couplings. ■■■

Homer Russell is the director of urban design at the Boston Redevelopment Authority and a graduate of Princeton and the Harvard Graduate School of Design.





## The Favored Circle: The Social Foundations of Architectural Distinction

by Garry Stevens  
MIT Press, 1998

Reviewed by Patrick Hickox

Garry Stevens challenges the notion that talent is responsible for architectural achievement, determining instead that architects owe their success to their social milieu, such as schools, social background, and a host of supportive parties. In pursuit of his theory, Stevens — a research associate in the architecture department at the University of Sidney — explores culture, psychology, taste, history, prestige, economics, certification, research, training (whew!) as they pertain to the “vocation of the architect.” The evidence, he concludes, is clear: Architects are elitist, sexist, inconsiderate of their clients, and (horrors) not prosperous.

His approach is perhaps best illustrated by his counter-attack on the critics of Tom Wolfe’s *From Bauhaus to Our House*. The public loved the book, he explains, but the profession and the handmaidens of their Art — the critics — spurned its obvious truth. Stevens evidently did not notice that the book was a lampoon — to attack or defend it was to take the bait, and so to fall prey to its sport.

The volume climaxes in an inspection of architectural schools. These institutions are underperforming, he alleges, pointing to the fact that there are one tenth as many doctorates awarded in architecture as in other academic fields — fewer, he snorts, than in home economics. Furthermore, he argues, the architectural faculty produce less research than their academic peers. A chronic ailment is the hostile relationship between the practitioners and the academics. He accuses the professionals of foisting the dirty task of CAD training onto the university. On their part, the schools are dominated by the studio system



and preoccupied with the Avant Garde. The Holy Grail for Stevens — strangely enough, in view of his general orientation — would appear to be some admixture of more practical schooling and apprenticeship, without the worship of *genus architectus creator*.

Borrowing from social science and postmodern scholasticism, paying toney obeisance to French critical theory, punctuating the argument with endless fun facts and gossip, the book has the appeal of salted peanuts. Nicely bound, it boasts a handsome Lichtensteinesque cover featuring a high-WASP visage that some architects, who aspire to the class this author derides, will find complimentary. Diagrams, maps, charts, and graphs suggest command of the subject. The book’s 223 pages should not threaten a population prone to attention deficit disorder, although its language, which exceeds parody of academic doublespeak, induces narcolepsy. Paul Goldberger’s comment that Mr. Wolfe had “a good ear for architecture” applies to this author, as his book has not one picture of a building.

Nonetheless, *The Favored Circle* may well become obligatory in every university library and establish its author as the world’s expert on his subject. It represents the victory of the artifact of a book over any larger purpose. Remember Lucky Jim — Kingsley Amis’ hapless hero? Here is his dissertation! One imagines this written on a dare, to illustrate that these methodologies (hellish phrase) could be applied to any subject and result in something academically respectable. To take issue is to complete the gag and so, alas, fall prey. ■■■

Patrick Hickox is a principal of Hickox-Williams Architects in Boston.

## Green Building Advisor Environmental Building News Iris Communications, 1998

Reviewed by Andrew St. John AIA



With the attention of the Clinton/Gore administration, sustainability has been the subject of renewed interest by the media, where it is often mistakenly used as a synonym for environmentalism. In fact, sustainability represents an even larger responsibility — to provide for the needs of the present without detracting from the ability of future generations to provide for their own needs. “Green building” is the practice of addressing that responsibility by adding environmental and social concerns to the economic criteria that have traditionally governed the building industry. It requires that developers, architects, and builders rethink their strategies for project success. The problem, even for dedicated practitioners, has been finding adequate information to identify alternative strategies.

*Environmental Building News*, the newsletter that is a pillar of the green building movement, has addressed this need with the *Green Building Advisor*, a database combining information about green building strategies, generic product listings, case studies, and references.

The *Green Building Advisor* is interactive — entering basic data about your project produces a list of recommended strategies. These initially appear simple, but each one can be expanded to view a number of detailed suggestions or

a list of appropriate products. You can also browse the list of strategies, categorized as “Site and Ecosystem,” “Energy Use,” “Water Use,” “Resources and Materials,” and “Indoor Environment.” Case studies and product descriptions complete the offering, with Web links that can be used to create a project file; printed out, this file can serve as a guideline for the overall technical development of a project. Specifiers can even tie the database to their own lists of project materials and products; the program will provide complete material and product specifications that can be printed and edited.

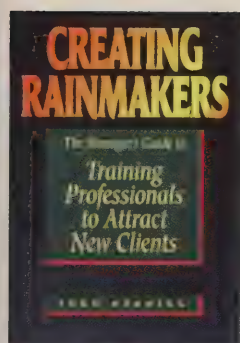
The program has organized a lot of basic information necessary to sustainable practice. If there is an area that could use improvement, it is the rationale for green building — the why as opposed to the what and the how. There is little discussion of the social dimensions of sustainable practice and none of the spiritual.

With that caveat, the CD technology provides a wealth of information in a clear and accessible format. Links between the tables in the database and related Internet sites allow a user to pursue a line of interest even beyond the CD. The listing of sources alone is a valuable tool for designers looking for products or information. Since 1992, *Environmental Building News* has been the most reliable and useful source of information on the practice of green building (a statement not influenced by my brief tenure as a member of its advisory board). Anyone with a real interest in this new field should own this CD. ■■■

Andrew St. John AIA is a program management consultant and writer specializing in issues of sustainable and ecological design. He is the author/editor of *The Sourcebook for Sustainable Design*, published by the BSA.

*Green Building Advisor* (\$179) is available from the BSA and from Iris Communications: 1-800-346-0104 ([www.crest.org/software-central](http://www.crest.org/software-central)).





## Creating Rainmakers: The Manager's Guide to Training Professionals to Attract New Clients

by Ford Harding  
Adams Media Corporation,  
1998

Reviewed by Virginia Quinn

Rainmakers are those magical individuals who, by attracting clients to their firms, create opportunities for others to do important work. Although their talent appears to be instinctive, their skills can be developed through training, mentoring, and financial incentives. Because rainmakers themselves typically are poor mentors, the responsibility for developing their successors often falls to others within the firm. Ford Harding's new book, *Creating Rainmakers: The Manager's Guide to Training Professionals to Attract New Clients*, is directed at those people.

The former director of marketing at The Hillier Group, Harding demonstrates that not all rainmakers are aggressive extroverts, "the selling type." They do, however, share the defining attribute of optimism, a relentlessly positive outlook on life. Although many come by this attribute naturally, optimism can be learned; the book offers a "negative thought log" exercise to help adjust the attitude of promising pessimists.

A chapter titled "What Rainmakers Know or the Mathematics of Selling" is arguably the most interesting in the book. It suggests, through abundant anecdotal evidence, six basic principles that successful rainmakers understand in their bones, including the need to

make time for selling and the value of a large and active network of contacts. Harding defines networking as more than just attending conferences and collecting business cards; true networking involves meeting appropriate people, learning about them, and finding ways to help with their business so that they will return the favor.

Throughout, Harding reminds managers that business development takes time; often, years pass before any results are seen. A firm's expectations must be realistic so that young staffers assigned to the rainmaking task do not become discouraged from the lack of immediate rewards.

This volume is a worthy sequel to Ford Harding's earlier book, *Rain Making: The Professional's Guide to Attracting New Clients* — the only book I know that offers clear and practical instruction in all the basics of business development for architects, engineers, and other professionals: how to generate leads, how to advance and close sales, and how to develop an achievable marketing strategy. Although experienced marketers may disagree with some of the author's pronouncements, both books are valuable contributions to the scant literature on marketing for architects and engineers.

In these busy boom times, it is easy for firms to overlook the development of their next generation of business-getters. But Harding notes that "trying to develop rainmakers in a recession is like planting crops in the middle of a drought." Now is the time to begin working to ensure the steady flow of new business that will carry your firm through the inevitable downturn. ■■■

Virginia Quinn, a marketing consultant to design professionals, is based in Arlington, MA. The former marketing director of Goody, Clancy & Associates, she has also served as director of the Society for Marketing Professional Services, Boston Chapter.

## Rendering Real and Imagined Buildings: The Art of Computer Modeling from the Palace of Kublai Khan to LeCorbusier's Villas

by B.J. Novitski, with a forward  
by William J. Mitchell  
Rockport Press, 1998

Reviewed by Geoffrey Moore  
Langdon AIA

With its 400 color illustrations and large format, *Rendering Real and Imagined Buildings* looks like a great coffee table book — an impression sustained by my initial cursory sampling of it. It is decidedly not a how-to book on 3D architectural modeling or rendering; virtually none of the process of creating the models, the images, or even the architecture is covered. However, after immersing myself in it — reading Bill Mitchell's intriguing points about the accurate depiction of imaginary and lost worlds, and perusing the virtual "Museum Gallery" on the accompanying CD — I realized that my first impressions were missing a great deal of the experience that this wonderful book offers.

Novitski offers a look at what is happening at the cutting edge of architectural CAD rendering, presenting the work of architects working in tandem with archaeologists and historical researchers to show us buildings that have been lost, or perhaps never were — buildings that exist only in the imagination, such as the Norse Asgard heaven, Frank Lloyd Wright's Mile-High City, and several student projects.

Each illustrated example describes the software used to model and render that project. The variety is impressive: from FormZ and GDS, to 3D Studio, ArchiCAD, Electric Image, even PowerCADD and MegaModel — and many more. However, it is difficult to use the book to evaluate modeling and rendering programs, because we see only the end

products — all of which look similarly convincing — with no indication of how much effort is required to generate them. Since the vast majority of the examples are student semester projects or ongoing long-term archaeological projects, we can infer that the resulting images and animations took a great deal of time and work.

The CD for Mac/Windows that comes with the book includes walk-throughs, animations, and photo-panoramas that you can explore at will, all organized in a gallery-like environment where you can approach what appears to be a painting on the wall, touch it, and suddenly jump into an animation of that world complete with appropriate music. This is definitely a richer experience than just reading a book; in fact, the sound and music for each environment at times even gave me chills, particularly in the ancient Anasazi *kiva* and the halls of Valhalla. The ability to "walk" around no longer existing buildings by Frank Lloyd Wright is a thrill for any architect.

*Rendering Real and Imagined Buildings* is a great educational tool that will excite people about architecture as spatial experience and will set a standard for a whole new genre of architectural publishing. ■■■

Geoffrey Moore Langdon AIA is a principal in Architectural CADD Consultants in Beverly, MA. He is the author of *Architectural CADD: A Resource Guide* and is the founder and organizer of the annual 3D CAD Shootout.





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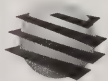
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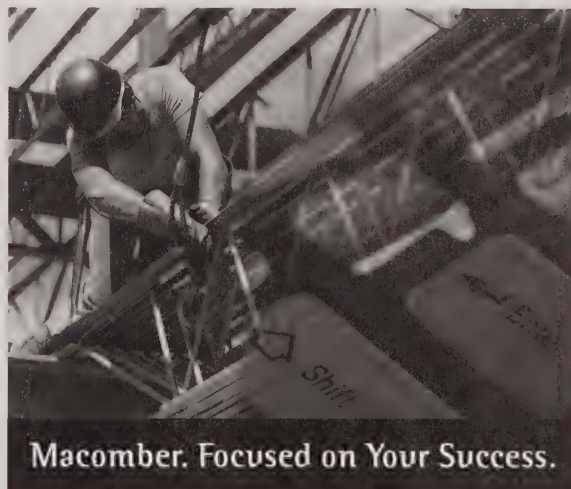
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[www.year2000.com](http://www.year2000.com)

For those who are still clueless, those who are masters of procrastination, or those who enjoy the *frisson* of fear associated with impending doom. Articles and links, including one to "Senator John Kerry on Y2K" — an astonishingly helpful primer for home offices and small businesses. Don't forget the Senator's "Just for Fun" site.

#### International Conference of Building Officials

[www.icbo.org](http://www.icbo.org)

This site won't win awards for cool graphics and techno-funk, but it should for clarity and precision — exactly what you hope for from the folks who write building codes. Code news and discussion (*see p.36*). Buy codes, reference material, and ICBO polo shirts through the online store.

#### ArchE+/BBZine

[www.usaor.net/users/archeplus/BBZine](http://www.usaor.net/users/archeplus/BBZine)

"The unofficial chronicle of architecture in competitions, polemics, commercials, trivia, and other nonsense." Mostly a collection of quotes, which the producers describe as "random nuisance, delicious tidbits, appalling statistics, useless scholarship." Architecture with Attitude. It's a little weird, but you have to love a site that includes Moore's "We pontificate, therefore we are." ■■■

Found any good Web sites addressing social or public issues in design?

Send your candidates for our Fall issue to: [architectureboston@architects.org](mailto:architectureboston@architects.org)



## Other Voices by John Campbell

## Route 128



THERE ARE MANY ASPECTS to self-identity. Mine include the ordinary familial aspects (father, son, lover) with cultural, political, spiritual, and a few other quirky aspects thrown into the stew. How one makes a living is a prominent part of self-identity for many people, and for me a powerful dimension of this vocational aspect is where I work. So when I recently took a job along Route 128, after working in downtown Boston, the move whacked that aspect of my self-identity out of its orbit.

Nine years ago, I started working at the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, in the aluminum and glass tower that looks from a distance like a giant washboard. What a cool building! Grand and powerful yet restrained — just like our central bank. Getting off the train at South Station, emerging from the concourse into the shadow of the Fed, then walking into the tall lobby gave me a thrill most every day. The magazine for which I was a writer and editor focuses on the New England economy, and there it all was, spread out before me through my office window. I could see the soaring new office towers built with money from mutual funds and

patent law and biotechnology, the older, more dignified granite buildings that sprung from Yankee shoe and textile money, the wharves that once served schooners hauling timber to England and ice blocks to the Caribbean. Every time I returned from an interview in some corner of New England, I could look out the window and savor my part as a small cog in the region's history.

My commute by train was a sociable one with my fellow travelers, not friends but friendly enough to talk with about the day's business. Even the occasional errand helped round out my urban work identity, as I navigated the narrow streets that pulsed with crowds of people, played the cocky pedestrian (go ahead, you arrogant SUV, just *try* to run me down!), and darted into the watch hospital on Bromfield Street to replace a broken strap.

Then last year, I moved to a new job near the intersection of Route 128 and Route 2. The job is great, and it stretches my skills in new directions. But in the physical surroundings, I feel adrift. The company I work for is located in a low-slung, anonymous structure bordered by woods on one side and highway on the other.

The location is certainly more convenient to my house. But it's less appealing to my self-identity.

Out here, I don't run into acquaintances in the course of walking to an appointment. In fact, I may never meet some of my colleagues. Many of the people I collaborate with are in New York or Hong Kong or Munich, and much of our communication is accomplished by trading e-mail and voice mail. I actually look forward to certain meetings for the slice of sociability. Sometimes, hunched over my laptop, I completely lose track of time and space. Then I have the urge to come up for air and wander — but where? If I have to run an errand during the day, I drive to Lexington's town center. It's a pleasant crossroad, with shops lining the two intersecting streets, but it's not exactly pulsing with people.

Driving to work, cocooned with my music or book-on-tape, I'm in the drone zone, an electronic bit in the data stream of traffic. During the traffic jams that occur after an accident or without any visible cause, I try to connect what little I know about chaos theory to the jam forming around me and which I help create. In a few minutes, we're whizzing along again past countless offices, malls, motels, warehouses. None of them invite a random encounter. Some of the technology palaces along Route 128 do project a certain splendor at a distance, however. One conference center in particular, high on a cliff, reflects a sublime twilight blue in its curving glass front. This frictionless detachment, I imagine, is how Prozac must feel. Downtown, I was denizen of the city. Can I reconcile my new role as digit of the technology highway? ■■■

John Campbell is senior editor at Mercer Management Consulting in Lexington, MA.



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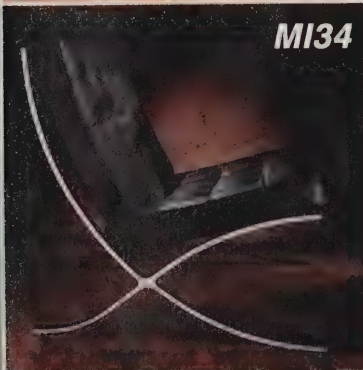
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# Architecture Boston

Fall 1999

Society

**Architects and planners in Boston tend to talk in circles**, or at least about circles. It probably started with Oliver Wendell Holmes, who convinced us that Boston is the hub of the solar system, if not the universe. Our pretensions may have been taken down a notch since Holmes' day, but the city has indeed become the center of a significant metropolitan system of "ring cities" and circumferential roadways as menacing as asteroid belts.

Perhaps no development has affected our view of this metropolitan area as much as the construction of the two circumferential highways. Route 128 was once hailed as "America's Technology Highway." The road reflected postwar optimism, spawning innovations like office parks and shopping center, offering vistas over woodlands and farms. Built in an era when families took Sunday drives for recreation, Route 128 today—car-choked and dysfunctional—is a contender for the 10th circle of the damned in Dante's hell.

Although Route 495 never captured our imaginations in the same way, the completion of this outer ring effectively redefined the geography of the metropolitan region. Small towns like Franklin and Westford are now among the fastest growing in the state. The notion of living and working in the same town seems positively retro, when thousands of workers commute across the New Hampshire and Rhode Island borders. Indeed, these bordering states are more familiar to Bostonians than the "outback" that lies west of 495. Mention the western Massachusetts towns of Monterey and Richmond, and most Bostonians will think of California and Virginia.

Today the 495 loop is a case study of the disastrous effects of sprawl. Sprawl is a national phenomenon, but a local dilemma. A case can be made—as Michael S. Dukakis does eloquently in this issue—for home-grown solutions crafted at the state and local levels. In a region characterized by municipal rivalries and political memory that even the Balkan states would admire, most planners here have despaired of ever finding collaborative solutions to growth concerns in metro Boston. And yet, as the participants in our roundtable discussion reveal, recent local initiatives suggest that a new model for collaborative, regional thinking is emerging.

What is the future of the cities and towns corralled within the 495 loop? If we are passive, past performance—unlike mutual funds—is probably a reasonably good indicator of future results. Roundtable participant Stephen Wishosky, describing a regional collaboration between the cities of Malden, Everett, and Medford, comments, "If we can do it, anyone can." This region is blessed with rich physical assets, an enormous investment in infrastructure, relatively easy access to capital, and unusually deep intellectual assets. If we can't solve this problem, no one can.

Elizabeth S. Padjen FAIA  
Editor

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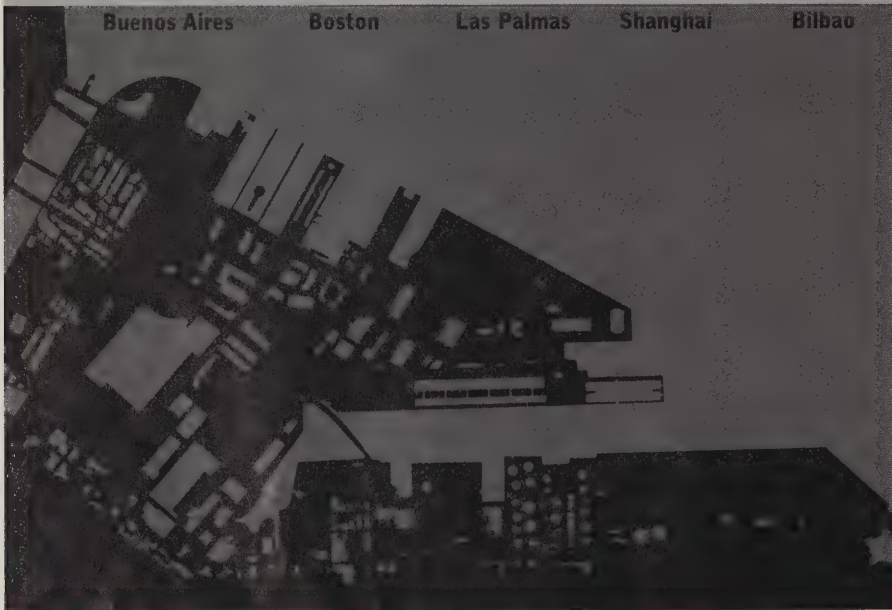
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Fall 1999:  
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*ArchitectureBoston*  
is published quarterly  
by the Boston Society  
of Architects/AIA.

Editorial office:  
52 Broad Street  
Boston, MA 02109  
Tel: 617-951-1433 x221  
Fax: 617-951-0845

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ISSN 1099-6346

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# Letters

THE "PRACTICE AND TECHNOLOGY" ISSUE of *ArchitectureBoston* (Summer 1999) highlighted many important and interrelated issues. Bill Mitchell, from his lofty perch in the technological Ivory Tower, enjoys a window into the future ("CAD: DOA@Y2K?") not unlike the view of the Promised Land enjoyed by Moses from the summit of Mt. Sinai. But if recent history is any guide, prognostications of emerging technological marvels should be greeted with a healthy skepticism. Bill's vision of the future may well become a reality; it is by no means assured. My advice to the reader is to accept any vision as one of many hypothetical probabilities. Then test it in the laboratory of actual experience.

At the opposite end of the theoretical spectrum, seven practitioners reported on the results from that laboratory ("Size Matters: Small firms, big business"). It is a truism that small businesses are the engine that drives the larger economy. Likewise, small architectural firms are the testing grounds for the profession as a whole. The challenge facing all architects at the end of the "first period" of computer technology history is not whether to deploy computer technology in architectural practice, but how much. The roundtable practitioners drew no clear distinctions among issues of technology deployment, business planning and growth, economic cycles, and professional development, because there are none.

Ed Frenette rounded out the theme of this issue by focusing on the inherent conflicts, both real and perceived, between corporate and creative cultures ("The Large Firm Artistically Considered"). The implicit thesis of his article is that the devotion of one's creative intellect to the successful resolution of these conflicts is a worthy, necessary and honorable thing to do. A healthy, profitable business enterprise is needed to create a stable environment in which creative activity can blossom.

What falls out of these articles is the unique opportunity that the many challenges of practice and technology present for intellectual growth and professional fulfillment. Architects too often fail to exploit their creative decision-making process in addressing business-management challenges. Architects must recognize themselves not as the hapless consumers of an inevitable technological juggernaut, but as the visionaries and specifiers of the technological future, as it applies to both the design of human environments and to the design process itself.

Michael Tardif, Assoc. AIA  
Director, Professional Practice  
The American Institute of Architects  
Washington, DC ■■■

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PAUL BYARD's *The Architecture of Additions* (book reviews, Summer 1999) is a timely handbook for designing in our contemporary world, where the need to contain sprawl encourages the creative re-use of the existing built environment. Contextualism, in the form of design and preservation guidelines, was a necessary response to the excesses of urban renewal and the lessons of history that were often lost upon many of the architects trained in the Modernist tradition.

Homer Russell, in his exemplary review, appropriately notes that the most successful of these guidelines are consistent and flexible rules, and cites several local examples to illustrate this point. Good additions do not necessarily genuflect to history, as Mr. Russell implies with the selections on his list, but they must be executed with intellectual rigor and architectural restraint. A design executed at this level often brings out the best qualities in the architect. This is nowhere more evident than in the work of Paul Rudolph, whose Jewett Arts Center at Wellesley College (1959) and rebuilding of the First Church in the Back Bay (1972), both delicate responses to their environments, represent two of the finest works of architecture of his generation in this area. In contrast, his Lindemann Center, built in the West End urban renewal area of Boston, and the University of Massachusetts campus at South Dartmouth—both large, free-standing commissions on open sites—display less discipline and have failed to achieve an equivalent level of quality and site sensitivity.

As our cities (and suburbs) continue to be renewed, design and preservation guidelines will foster a growing demand for quality and sensitivity in architectural additions. Architects can best meet this challenge through a commitment to rigor in the analysis of context, a thorough understanding of history, and the judicious application of sound design principles.

David N. Fixler AIA  
Director of Historic Preservation  
Perry Dean Rogers & Partners: Architects  
Boston ■■■

ALBERT HARKNESS HAS SOUNDED THE ALARM: "Performance-Based Codes are Coming! Performance-Based Codes are Coming!" ("Constructive Advice: Codes, Litigation, and You," p.36, Summer 1999). The article begins with an excellent discussion of the origins and implications of prescriptive and performance-based codes, then abruptly changes course to discuss the use of building codes in civil litigation. This topic is raised to demonstrate that "showing that a building complies with all applicable codes can be a powerful argument for the defense," that is, for an architect who is being sued in a personal injury case. In performance-based design, the author argues, there can be no such defense, as the criteria for evaluating the design are too vague to provide a legal shield against potential litigants.

We would argue otherwise. In order for performance-based design to achieve acceptance and wide use in the design and enforcement communities, mutually acceptable review criteria must be used. These criteria are the equivalent of the prescriptive requirements that Mr. Harkness takes such comfort in. In fact, our prescriptive code in Massachusetts already contains several provisions for the acceptance of performance-based designs by a building official or the Board of Building Regulations and Standards. Codes have always allowed this option, typically through a cumbersome appeals process. Does an architect who secures a variance from the requirements of the building code, or who takes advantage of

the opportunities for performance-based design already allowed in the code, assume greater potential liability? Only a lawyer is properly qualified to answer this question. Architects and their consultants need to focus on life safety and their client's needs, without allowing a fear of liability exposure to limit their professional creativity.

When the author states that "any building codes we adopt are likely to be applied retroactively in litigation," he appears to imply that code-writing should be driven by a concern for avoiding designer liability exposure. This has never been the intent of any code, and should not become the intent of any future code. A performance-based code with clear evaluation criteria, a solid scientific basis, and applied with sound professional judgment and good practice, is nothing to be afraid of. In fact it offers opportunities to the designer and client that could not otherwise be achieved.

Paul D. Sullivan PE  
A. Vernon Woodworth AIA  
Sullivan Code Group  
Boston ■■■

THE MAIN CONCERN of Mr. Harkness' article appears to be the lack of specific guidance provided by a performance-based code and its contribution to liability. It should be noted that under the current prescriptive code, performance-based designs have already been occurring for years through the "alternate materials and methods" section of the code. This section simply requires that the approach be shown to be equivalent to the prescriptive provisions. However, it is very difficult to measure what is meant by "equivalent" since no clear guidance is given on the intent of the code or an administrative process, and no measurable criteria are provided. Therefore, the performance code will be an improvement on our current system by providing the intent of the code and administrative provisions. The ICC (International Code Council) committee is pursuing a framework that may help to provide measurable criteria in the future.

We anticipate that most designs will be based on the prescriptive code with perhaps some performance-based components; the prescriptive code will always be available as a design method. In fact, prescriptive provisions will probably increase as new innovative techniques become widely accepted.

Reports from the ICC Building Performance Committee and the ICC Fire Performance Committee are available on the Internet at [www.intlcode.org](http://www.intlcode.org).

Beth Tubbs PE  
Staff Engineer  
International Conference of Building Officials  
Whittier, CA ■■■

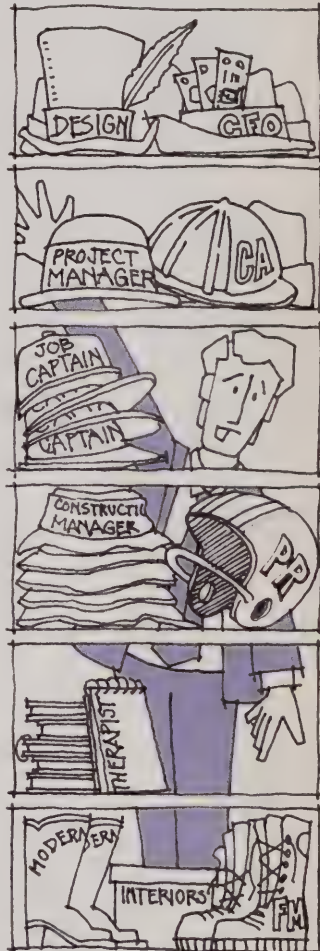
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We want to hear from you. Send letters to [architectureboston@architects.org](mailto:architectureboston@architects.org) or to: *ArchitectureBoston*, 52 Broad Street, Boston, MA 02109-4301.

Letters may be edited for clarity and length and must include your name, address, and daytime telephone. Please submit letters intended for our Winter issue by September 20, 1999.

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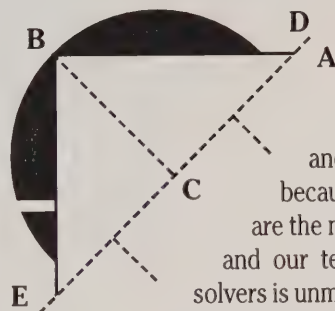
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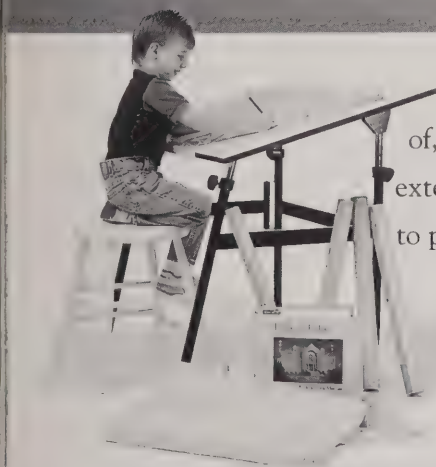
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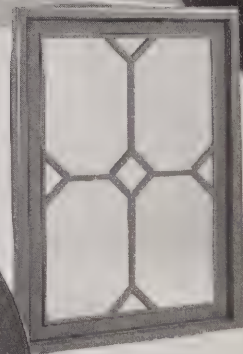
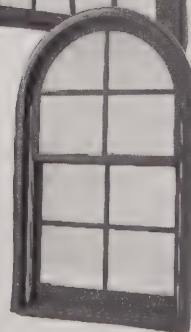
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# Rim Shot

## Reinventing Boston's rim cities

In the midst of a national discussion about the paralyzing effects of sprawl, planners and policymakers have begun to focus on the hidden assets of older cities: ready-made labor markets, housing stocks, and utility and transportation infrastructures. These cities are especially common in the Northeast; local planners regularly refer to Boston's "ring cities"—the small municipalities that dot the metropolitan area. But a cluster of communities located on Boston's northern rim—Chelsea, Revere, Everett, Malden, Medford, and Somerville—may offer more than an alternative to sprawl. These communities—which we have dubbed the "rim cities"—may be the key to a new regional economy.

Barry Bluestone is the Russell B. and Andrée Stearns Trustee Professor of Political Economy at Northeastern University, where he is also director of the Center for Urban and Regional Policy.

Richard C. Howard is mayor of the city of Malden and chairman of the Mystic Valley Development Commission.

Alex Krieger FAIA is chairman of the Department of Urban Planning and Design at the Harvard Graduate School of Design and a principal of Chan Krieger & Associates in Cambridge.

Elizabeth Padjen FAIA is editor of *ArchitectureBoston*.

Guy Santagate is city manager of the city of Chelsea.

George Thrush AIA is head of the architecture program at Northeastern University and a principal of SmartArchitecture in Cambridge.

Stephen M. Wishoski is executive director of the Malden Redevelopment Authority, which manages the TeleCom City project for the cities of Malden, Everett, and Medford.





Photo courtesy city of Malden

**Padjen** Having invited you to talk about the role of the rim cities in a regional economy, I suppose we should start by asking if these communities already consider themselves to be part of a regional economy. Do you see yourselves as being cities with common problems and common purposes? Do you have any kind of regional discussions among yourselves?

**Santagate** We have a lot of discussions, especially with Malden, Everett, and Revere—cities that share problems with Chelsea, especially regional problems like transportation. If this country had been settled from west to east, instead of east to west, New England would be one state, and these cities would be one city. It's absurd to have these small cities all over the place. We don't need 10 mayors and 10 chiefs-of-police and 10 fire chiefs and all the expense that goes with it. But that's a political problem that I don't have an answer to. We share development problems—we don't have any open space to develop. We can only offer underutilized property, where a building can be torn down to put the site to better use.

**Howard** The communities are linked in many ways—politically, demographically, and historically. You can see traditional rivalries that are broken down along those geographic lines. But if you looked at the issues that are at the core of how each of the communities functions, there are definitely more similarities than there are differences. I think every community has unique issues that have to be dealt with from its own perspective. Open space is a real concern in Chelsea, for instance, but is probably not as critical in Malden. But it's clear that 20th-century transportation systems have erased whatever barriers existed between communities. The issues that affect the quality of life in these urban rim communities are pretty much the same. If crime is happening in one city, you can be sure that somebody else is going to feel it in the next community over. If education isn't good in Malden, Medford, Everett, and Somerville, that has an impact on the economy of the whole region.

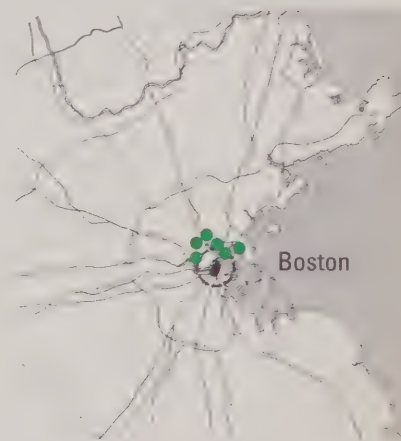
**Padjen** These cities have been leapfrogged by development—the development community has focused on the next layer out from Boston and jumped right over you. And yet you offer an enormous investment in infrastructure close at hand. What are some of the great obstacles to attracting new development?

**Howard** The leapfrogging goes back to federal and state transportation policies that created the outer rings, the Route 495 loop and the Route 128 loop. People were moving out to the suburbs, and it was only natural that development tended to follow those travel corridors. But I think we're now seeing a little bit of a reverse. We're encouraging new development in Malden. We have traditionally had an industrial base similar to Chelsea's. We believe in reinvesting in those areas that were traditional industrial generators back in the early 1900s; where it's appropriate, these areas should be looked at as new sites for future economic development instead of eating up even more unused land and open space in the suburbs.

**Wishoski** One of the questions we needed to answer when we were trying to get state support for TeleCom City was, "Why doesn't the private sector do it?" We were able to show the state that in the last development boom in the late 1980s, development came right out to the Wellington [transit] station at Route 16, stopped, leapfrogged over this site, and started up again in downtown Malden, where we had some office development. And then it continued out to Route 128. Now we're in the midst of another economic boom of even greater proportions. Yet the private sector still hasn't stepped up—they jumped over it again. So it's appropriate for the state to step in and help us assemble this land to create this platform for development.

**Padjen** Where is the site? And what do you anticipate in terms of the size of the project and the number of jobs?

**Wishoski** It's a 200-acre site on land that includes the cities of Malden, Medford, and Everett. Right now, it's mostly low-end industrial—box storage and the like. It's bisected by the Malden River, which is a tributary of the Mystic River. Our master-plan calls for the construction of 1.8 million square feet of new space in addition to 750,000 square feet already on site—a total of about 2.5 million square feet. We estimate that there will be about 7,500 new jobs created on site, and that the spinoff development that would occur within the three cities would total about 16,000 jobs.



Base map courtesy of George Thrush AIA

**Above: The rim cities: Somerville, Medford, Malden, Everett, Revere, Chelsea.**

**Opposite: The 200-acre TeleCom City site (foreground) in Malden, Medford, and Everett, bisected by the Malden River.**





Photo courtesy, city of Chelsea

Winnisimmet Street, Chelsea, with view to Boston

**Padjen** And it focuses on the telecommunications industry.

**Wishoski** Yes. The premise is to create a shared campus for Boston-based universities for applied research in conjunction with private companies in the telecommunications field. It will be the focal point of a statewide initiative; plans are to link fiber-optically to sites in Springfield, Sturbridge, and Fort Devens. This will be essentially a large incubator where ideas will be germinated, where products will be taken to the prototype stage. And when the prototypes are ready for production, we hope to direct that activity to the western part of the state.

**Padjen** Is this a reasonable model for other similar cities? It seems to be a textbook example of using the public sector to seed economic activity, which, we hope, will take root and flourish in the private sector.

**Howard** It's a model for regional collaboration, where you can erase geographic boundaries. The three cities developed a common tax rate and common zoning, so it doesn't make a difference where the development begins within that 200 acres. We all share equally in the growth potential. We all participate in proportional shares. So to that extent, there is a model here that I think other communities can emulate. Some communities in the Lawrence area are now talking about a common parcel for some low- and middle-income affordable housing opportunities.

**Wishoski** If we can do it, anybody can do it. And that's from the perspective of the guy who had to go before all the city councils and pitch this idea. You couldn't have had three more competitive communities try to put something together. Malden and Medford have the second oldest high-school football rivalry in the country. Malden-Everett is about the fifth or sixth oldest. They've been competing at everything. But I defy you to drive from Medford into Everett and say when you are crossing the town line. They all look exactly alike. The demographics are very similar if not identical. This is a really good example of elected officials seeing beyond their own self-interest.

**Howard** It's really one of the only ways you can compete in this area. How do you compete with the city of Boston for attention from the federal government, the state, and all the associated agencies? Boston is the major magnet for everything that flows into the region. And for small communities that are on that rim, the only answer is to team up. We just received a \$500,000 brownfields grant from the EPA [Environmental Protection Agency]. None of us would have received that individually. But when you can say, here's a collaborative effort that helps our region, not just one community, you can distinguish yourself from what's going on right over the river in downtown Boston.

**Santagate** You're right about competing with Boston. We've had to change our attitude in Chelsea. For example, Massport built the [Tobin] bridge right through the middle of our city—it destroyed the city. Chelsea's strategy over the years was to publicly punch Massport in the nose, feel good, and go home. It doesn't work. Instead, I tell Massport, "We're upset because of the pollution and the noise, but I want to do business with you because we're one mile from Logan Airport, and we can use all those support businesses, hotels, and office space." So we signed an economic development pact with Massport, under which we will work jointly to move support businesses over to Chelsea. The Massport people will help us dredge the waterfront, which is a federal waterway and is not under our control. They can help us with the state zoning. It's for marine-related uses only right now, but [Chelsea Creek's] not big enough for marine-related uses. And meanwhile, they will pay \$500,000 to the city of Chelsea for the next five years to help get all that done.

We know we can't compete with Boston, but we can offer things that Boston can't. Space in Chelsea costs half of what it does in Boston, and we're right next door. We've zeroed in on the food sector—the old Faneuil Hall wholesale market moved over to Chelsea. We're concentrating on limo and busing services and security businesses. And we're looking for other gaps we can fill that Boston's not interested in.

Chelsea could be an industrial park tomorrow if that's what we wanted, but we also want to make sure we develop a *community*. The American dream is to move out to the suburbs. I don't know why—I've got a big yard, and I don't know what to do with it. I only use it three weeks a year, and I have to mow the lawn. But we'd like some open space in Chelsea, and we don't have that. We're planning a walkway to get people down along the waterfront. I was born and brought up in Chelsea, but I was 23 before I realized it was a waterfront community. I never saw the water, because the oil tanks are all over the place. But most of the tanks will go eventually, basically because of the economics.



**Bluestone** It seems to me that you've both hit on two very good ideas. One is that the new structure of industry is around clusters of industries and networked firms that work together. The firms feed on each other. The other addresses the competitive problem—the wars between the states or, in this case, the wars between the cities, to attract capital. What you've done through these cooperation agreements is essentially end the civil war. You've said we're going to work together, and we'll all benefit from it. So now we have these three communities—Medford, Malden, and Everett—working together. And you're doing it around a cluster economy focused on a 21st-century industry. It seems to me that's the right formula.

There's a triple revolution going on in the greater Boston region. The first part is a demographic revolution—moving away from a Eurocentric to a multicultural community. Chelsea's the perfect example. If you go back to 1960, 98.8 percent of Chelsea's population was white. Even in 1970, 97.5 percent was white. In the 1990 census, 41 percent was non-white. I'm sure that in the 2000 census, a majority will be non-white. And overwhelmingly Latino.

**Howard** In 1985, Malden was 98 percent white. In the 2000 census, it will be closer to 70 percent white, 30 percent a mixture of minorities.

**Bluestone** There is no metropolitan area, including Los Angeles, that has had such a radical transformation in its population. And the new population coming into this region, a heavily immigrant population, has what we could call a bimodal distribution of education. A very large proportion of the immigrant population, actually larger than the native-born, has more than a college education; they work in the universities, in high tech, and finance. But at the other end, we're getting a very large proportion with less than a high school education. We're going to have to create a diverse industrial base that takes advantage of both ends of that distribution.

The second part of the revolution is an industrial revolution—moving from a mill-based industry to mind-based industry. You see it in the growth of the service sector.

And the third, most critical to your communities, is that we're moving from the idea of the hub to the idea of a metropolis, so this whole region becomes one economic area. Today, it is regions of a country that really compete—the Research Triangle in North Carolina, or Silicon Valley, or even the new area around Berlin, Germany. Our region was a basket case in the early 1980s. But by the 1990s, we were ranked in the top five regions on all kinds of things, including growth in median family income. So we've really turned the corner. And a large part of it has been based on the fact that we have six key industrial sectors that are making the difference. Number one is higher education, a major export industry with 350,000 students. Healthcare is the second. The third is finance. The

fourth is high tech, including biotech. The fifth traditionally has been defense. And then there is construction, both private, and with the Big Dig, public. You add those all together and you get a high-flying economy. If there's any time that communities like Medford, Malden, Everett, Somerville, Revere, and Chelsea can make it, it's now.

**Thrush** These communities have shared economic profiles, but we should also note that they share an asset—their proximity to the center of Boston. There's a confluence of forces at work here. There are opportunities in terms of redevelopable land and underutilized land. And there's the existing, as well as the potential, transportation infrastructure. The character of much of these communities and the connective corridors between them is what you might call “default character.” It's simply the consequence of a certain kind of economic development that went on in the past. If we are reconsidering economic development in these areas, it's a great opportunity for us to jointly come up with some physical criteria for what we would like those areas to be. Otherwise, of course, the suburban development model will prevail, and we know what that will yield. The office park is a great generator of jobs, but it's not the greatest generator of community life.

**Krieger** I'm not sure whether we're talking about how these older cities compete with the center, namely Boston, which is one issue, or whether, as in other parts of the country, we're actually competing against the periphery—the Route 495 corridor—which is a different set of issues. All six of the sectors that Barry mentioned were here when times were bad, too. So they don't quite explain what's happened. I think something else is happening culturally in American society. Guy isn't the only one who says, “Why do I need a big yard?” Culturally, many of us are saying that we don't need a big yard, and the



Rowhouses, Beacon Street, Chelsea

Photo courtesy city of Chelsea



sons and daughters of the baby boomers, who didn't want to mow their lawns for their parents, are asking the same question. We're shifting from one ideal to another kind of ideal, and part of it is reflected in the fascination we now have with inner cities and downtowns, as places not of toil, but pleasure. That's an amazing change from the 19th century. Americans have always have wanted to live, not in the city or the country, but somewhere "in-between." That used to be the suburb—between downtown Boston and the real countryside. Now that whole ring is homogeneous and not very interesting. The in-between place now is potentially Malden or Everett or Chelsea. And that's a major cultural shift, which we're not even cognizant of yet, but I think it bodes well for these communities.

**Padjen** But what happens if suddenly these cities become fashionable? What if all of a sudden, Chelsea becomes the new hot city? It's not that hard to imagine.

**Santagate** I imagine it every day.

**Padjen** It's a scenario that denies the other historic aspect of many of these cities, which is a home for new Americans, the immigrant communities, which is a role they had for hundreds of years and still have to this day. But what happens if the low real-estate values that are attracting service businesses to Chelsea start to go up? Housing goes up. And all of a sudden the population base that has historically found a home in Chelsea has to go someplace else.

**Santagate** That's the gentrification issue.

**Thrush** This issue has to get addressed head-on, it seems to me. And we need to be careful about what the consequences of that fear are. We can find ourselves saying that, in order to maintain the accessibility of our metropolitan area to people of all income groups, we need to make sure that we don't make it too nice, because these neighborhoods might increase in value. There is no catch-all answer to gentrification—if neighborhoods physically improve in a market economy, it is likely that their demographics will change. But there are ways to inoculate your community against this. For example, communities with larger stocks of public housing are much more protected against complete gentrification than others. But this is a time when

authenticity of urban experience has become a much more valued commodity, and that's going to continue as the country expands and our cities become more and more anonymous.

**Wishoski** We know, for example, that TeleCom City is going to have a major economic impact on Malden and on the value of houses. But affordable housing is not just a Malden problem; it's a regional problem. So we formed another collaboration called the North Suburban Home Consortium that includes Malden, Medford, Everett, Chelsea, Revere, Arlington, and Melrose. That consortium brings in about \$2 million a year for affordable housing. It's not public housing, it's private housing. But we want to be sure that we don't leave behind all the people who traditionally have been able to live in Chelsea and Malden and Everett and Medford.

**Krieger** Regionalism is playing heavily in our conversation. But regionalism is not a late 20th-century idea—it's a late 19th-century idea. Now we're once more waking up to the notion that actually very few problems in a metropolitan area can be solved by isolating them.

**Thrush** In this area, something becomes a regional problem in only three or four miles—in Chicago it doesn't become a regional problem until it's 12 or 15 miles from the heart of the city. And it seems that the MBTA [Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority] is one of the only vehicles, for good or ill, to act or plan regionally. If that's going to continue to be the case, we have to find a way to imbue the MBTA with a broader agenda, because transportation criteria alone do not address the same kind of comprehensive issues that we're talking about.

**Howard** From a community perspective, transportation is more than the functional necessity of getting people to and from their workplace. Social time now is also built around transportation—shopping, kids playing in soccer leagues, people going out to eat. From a social perspective, there's still a dependence on vehicular transportation and the roadway network that links all these communities. But from an economic development perspective for Telecom City, the goal is to have an intermodal site, so you could get on a commuter rail, get off at Malden Station, and walk down to the site. People from the three communities could bike to get to work. They could literally walk to work from their neighborhoods.

**Thrush** That makes a great case for the "Urban Ring"—the plan to connect autonomous communities like Boston, Brookline, Cambridge, Somerville, Everett, and Chelsea with a new strand of public transportation. And I think the Urban Ring will work because it's a pinpointed strategy for dealing with one problem with regional aspects—as opposed to a regional plan that also tells Malden what it must do throughout the city. That notion of one über-plan, one overarching plan, has been rejected both at the academic level and at the political level. But this sort of targeted planning holds

Tobin Bridge, Chelsea





great promise. It's regional thinking but it's not overly-homogenizing regional thinking. One can still conceive of a Medford-Malden football rivalry; there would still be some aspect of these cities that is distinct. If we started to think more about this kind of planning, based on a common element that everyone agrees on, it would probably spread to other issues. Communities sharing a common economic interest in one site might share a common vision of what that connection between them looks like. And, eventually, they would have criteria in hand for reshaping proposals to be more supportive of their common vision.

**Padjen** That raises another social and cultural issue. If the population of these cities is changing, with a lot of newcomers who may or may not think of these cities as a permanent home, how do you develop a shared vision? Do these new residents participate in any kind of conversation about the character of these cities, about civic issues?

**Santagate** There's a lot of transiency in Chelsea—a lot of people don't stay very long. We have a long and proud history of being an immigrant community, a gateway community. It brings a lot of culture, strength, and diversity to the city. But the turnover ratio in the Chelsea schools is 25 percent a year. Bosnians, for example, arrive with a high degree of education and move out quickly. As for people moving back, it's not going to happen overnight.

**Wishoski** Malden is seeing people move back and buying homes—people who want to be party of the city. We've also seen a huge increase in the minority population—mostly Asian—and that's because Chinatown is also on the Orange Line. Although there are 39 languages spoken in Malden High School, the predominant minority population is Chinese. But the Chinese community does not participate in anything. I know the mayor and his staff and city agencies have done a lot of outreach to try to get the Asian people involved in the community. But their children go home after school; they don't participate in any of the sports programs. Their families go into Boston for their cultural opportunities. Even the hospital had a hard time trying to do outreach to find out what their medical needs were. So that's a challenge that the city faces.

**Santagate** Of the 6,000 kids in the Chelsea school system, 4,000 have English as their second language. And we teach in eight languages in the schools. We've seen a big difference between the Asian and Hispanic populations in terms of government involvement. There's no doubt about that. Hispanics are involved in government and involved in the community. But we've had the same experience as Malden with the Asians.

**Wishoski** It's a major challenge. The city needs to develop a strategy, because you don't want to ignore what's now about 15 percent of the population of Malden—and growing.



Neighborhood street, Chelsea

**Bluestone** I've been involved in a survey in which we asked a very extensive set of questions about racial attitudes and residential segregation. It turns out that blacks, whites, and Hispanics all would prefer, on average, to live in an integrated community. The problem is that they all set the percentages differently. Whites don't want to live in a community in which they represent any less than a significant majority. Blacks want to live in an integrated community, but one in which there is a substantial proportion of families of their own race. What you need to do is invest in your community so that it becomes an absolutely spectacular place to live. So people don't suddenly move out if the racial mix shifts, because they want to live in the community. They know they're going to have the best parks. They're going to have great schools. They're going to have wonderful transportation. They're going to have the cultural amenities they want. And when you do that, people stay. The South End is a good example. It's been able to build a stable, diverse community by adding content to the amenities so that it becomes the kind of place people want to live in.

**Santagate** That's exactly right. I've given a lot of thought to the reasons the city of Chelsea went into receivership. If you look back to the 1950s, the city of Chelsea asked Harvard University to study its school system and make recommendations. The Harvard report recommended building new schools. We hadn't built a new school since 1910. The city turned its back on that and refused to invest—probably the only community in the state that didn't take advantage of public funds to build new schools. We did the reverse of what Barry just recommended. And I can tell you firsthand that's when the downward spiral began. Talk about brain drain—anybody who cared about their kids' education, the young people whom you should invest in, flew out of the city. We lost the talent the community could have drawn on—for appointments to public boards and committees, the kind of people you could elect to office. It led to corruption in the corner office for years; it led to mismanagement; it led to the city being driven into bankruptcy.

**Krieger** Relatively speaking, this is a fairly affluent nation and, with the exception of the bottom 10 or 15 percent, we all have certain choices. And that's what people fail to realize. A community can compete by doing things better—providing better schools or a work environment that also provides other amenities like access to the T and good housing.





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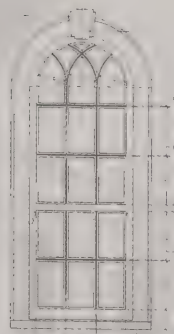
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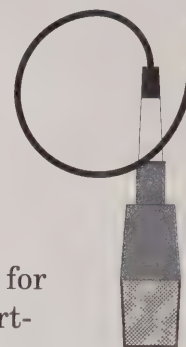
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# A Clean, Well-Lighted Place

## Public space, private dollars

by Shirley Kressel ASLA

Photos: Shirley Kressel

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**No design discussion about public space gets far** before the dose-of-economic-reality question arises: "Who'll pay for it?" If, as Oliver Wendell Holmes said, taxes are the price of a civilized society, we seem to have given up on the notion of civilization, at least the part that includes pooling resources for the common good. The suggestion that public funds should properly pay for public space is immediately dismissed: Government is broke. Government is incompetent. Government has more important things to do.

Who'll pay for it? The correct answer: the private sector. Or, more accurately today, "public/private partnerships"—the euphemism for private shells with public stuffing.

When we assume that private funding of public space is our only choice, private funding indeed becomes our only choice. And so we see the results—in parks and plazas and streets all over the country. Whether in the form of business investments or of corporate philanthropy, private interests are reaching into every part of the public domain—education, justice, transportation, common open space. We want to run government like a corporation, so it can be as successful as the corporations. After all, didn't capitalism win over communism, proving that the market makes the smartest government?

Privatization of public spaces makes a lot of people happy. Public officials are happy because they can boast to voters that they are keeping a lid on taxes by cultivating "revenue streams" from corporate donors. This creates lots of public goodwill for politicians' pro-business policies. And the taxes saved thanks to corporate beneficence can be put to good use—for example to reward those very benefactors with tax abatements, public land, capital grants, and city contracts. But who's counting? Those private public spaces all look so pretty!

Designers are happy because corporate clients want much more pizzazz in their piazzas. With bigger budgets, private work is much likelier to end up as a spread in the trade magazines. Spelling out "Coca-Cola" in colored pavers is a small price to pay.

The Chamber of Commerce is happy because corporations make "attractions"—programmed "destinations," replete with "activated edges," "piazzettas," and "pedestrian ways"—while



government departments just make parks and streets. Tourists can look around and see that it was all made for them and that even in the big bad city they are absolutely safe in the sponsored squares of the urban checkerboard.

Prosperous citizens are happy because they feel they are getting something tax-free. They figure it's worth a little tasteful advertising on colorful banners and bronze plaques, a few restrictions on access, some artfully hidden cameras, and discreet "no petitions" signs. (Who does political stuff anyway! We're all fine!) Visitors from outside the "inner city" especially welcome the extra police (public and private), since they themselves obviously have no reason to fear over-zealous officers. They are happy to get a nicely landscaped park or well-managed street, manicured, spotless, and—most important—totally safe and secure. The activities in these private public spaces are always fun: carefully planned, nothing unexpected or uncontrolled. And, because the sponsors always provide plenty of parking, there's no need to travel on the subway, elbow-to-elbow with God-knows-who.

Most of all, corporations are happy to take care of public places, because they can then control them. Control of public space is a very important power, especially in a society with an increasingly bothersome wealth gap, where discontented have-nots tend to "take it to the streets." The ability to control who's hanging around the front yard is especially valuable when investing in real estate, when image is everything.

Of course, properly publicized philanthropy is also very useful; even Machiavelli advised the well-feared prince to inspire a little love in his subjects. The visibility of the corporate logo in open spaces and cultural facilities creates kinder and gentler associations, promoting both the product and the company itself. Perhaps a generous sponsor wants one day to close the street for a special company event. Why not! He pays for it! Maybe a group of donors offers to "revitalize" the park by adding, say, a hotel. Indeed, why should open space just sit there, an underperforming asset? Parks should support themselves just like any other real estate! As the local hero, the corporate "prince" finds a smiling welcome at the zoning board when he needs it, and the most deserving princes get streets and parks named for them. It's a win-win for the corporations, who are rewarded for protecting their property values and promoting their products. Now their

interests *are* the "public interest." No need to worry about the difference between public and private sectors any more. They've merged.

So, what's the problem? Isn't everyone happy? Well, almost. There are perhaps a few malcontents, but we are not making nice places only to have them spoiled by "undesirables." You know who they are—they are "those people," and they had better behave extra well if they want to avoid a pat-down. People who are (or look) homeless had best keep moving, preferably to another neighborhood. And let's not forget those teenagers in baggy pants, who create image problems that make shoppers uncomfortable.

And then there are activists with petitions, and protesters who need a place to protest. No one wants to be reminded of sweatshops or corruption in such pretty places.

And worried parents, raising the first generation of children to grow up in a culture entirely defined by advertising; logos are everywhere, because corporations know that brand loyalty starts young.

And the small landowners who suddenly find that the people who cleaned up the place are now assembling neighborhood lots for "higher and better uses"; they worry, will they be bought out, squeezed out by soaring property taxes, or just taken by eminent domain?

And don't forget the people living in less fancy neighborhoods who find city services shrinking as politicians cut budgets, anticipating rescue by the private sector. But the pols. have forgotten that private donors aren't interested in those neighborhoods.

OK, then, maybe there are a few complaints. Still, everybody knows there have to be trade-offs—we have no choice but to give our public powers and resources to private interests in exchange for our public goods. But we can't demand public accountability from private groups, and so we can't direct the use of those powers and resources to achieve the public interest. And that means we give up not only on Holmes' notion of civilization, but also on the notion of a democratic society.

But let's be more positive! Look how clean and safe and pretty it all is! Finally, the trains are running on time! Isn't that worth everything? ■■■

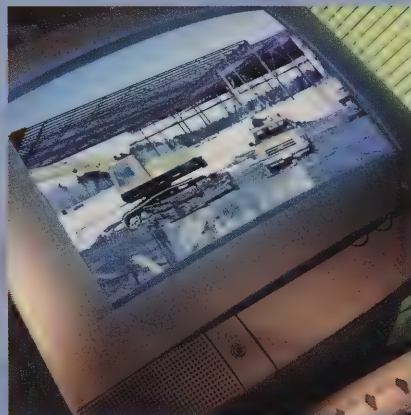
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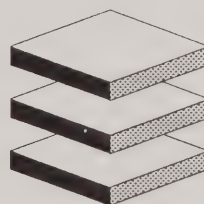
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# Studs Terkel or Martha Stewart?

## The entrepreneurial neighborhood

by Michael Pyatok FAIA



Photos courtesy Michael Pyatok FAIA

**Urban neighborhoods**, especially in older communities like the ring cities of Boston, often face a chicken-and-egg dilemma: Which comes first—the real estate or the jobs? Too often, fixing the real estate is the answer. Employers won't move into areas displaying severe physical signs of disinvestment, or so the argument goes. But improving the “sticks and bricks”—as difficult as that may be sometimes—is often a quicker and easier first step than importing businesses with decent jobs and revitalizing local schools to offer challenging and effective education.

We have already learned that the wholesale removal of people and their neighborhoods is an inappropriate response to urban decline; Boston's West End is the object lesson for us all. We seem, however, to be doomed to lurch from one solution to the next. The latest mythic cure promoted by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and many redevelopment agencies is to instead import people with higher incomes, particularly homeowners. (Importing businesses is apparently still an elusive goal.) Advocates assert that mixing incomes is healthier for a neighborhood than maintaining its low-income homogeneity. But the effects of implementing this policy can be as devastating as the urban renewal strategies of the '60s. The social engineering associated with relocating the poor with rent vouchers (as HUD's HOPE VI program is doing) and with even less sensitive one-time reimbursements in order to make room for people with stable, higher incomes, forces the same painful personal and economic costs on those who must move as it did 30 years ago. And for those who do remain as part of the “mix,” new neighbors who are already gainfully employed do little to create real job opportunities locally.

In the same way that the implementation of this newer “mixed-income” social policy has its flaws, so, too, does the architectural and urban design clothing in which it comes dressed today. The architects facing the design implications of these policies fixate on those picturesque architectural qualities that will attract people with discretionary income.

These architects sincerely believe that those who are unemployed or underemployed need domestic stage-sets from yesteryear to feel that they belong with the higher income class of their employed new neighbors. Somehow, having their own home and front porch is expected to catapult them into the middle class—which this kind of domestic imagery purports to reflect. In this sense, the Martha Stewarts of urban design are intruding on the lives of disenfranchised people like those documented by Studs Terkel, insulting their cultures and ignoring their most significant economic needs.

Both the architects and the social planners believe that this strategy of “fixing” real estate in order to attract affluent outsiders is the only answer. But they have forgotten a time-tested solution that sustained many previous generations: the incubation of local home-grown businesses.

If we make local, resident-initiated, entrepreneurial activity a prime social and economic objective, then certain urban design and architectural responses would naturally follow. The result would be a new type of live-work community that can accommodate home-based businesses such as repairing autos or appliances, making clothing or furniture, manufacturing home decorations, providing hair and nail care services. These kinds of businesses are critical to economic survival, even if they may be somewhat untidy. In fact, to the Martha Stewarts of urban design, they may seem downright “grungy.”





As much as 25 percent or more of the population of today's inner cities lives under the same difficult economic circumstances as our 19th-century pioneers and immigrants. But economic opportunities that were available 150 years ago are now disallowed by modern zoning, building codes, lending guidelines, insurance policies, and property management practices. The residential block no longer also serves as an incubator of small manufacturing and repair workshops, and the neighborhood is no longer seen as a thriving, if messy, exporter of goods and services. Instead, our urban residential districts strive to be bucolic settings for retreat and home-based escapist consumption, relying upon local, cutesy retail centers to distribute goods produced elsewhere.

Public officials, developers, property managers, and lenders need to recognize that those struggling up from the bottom have little concern about the long-term "exchange value," or resale value, of their dwellings. Instead, they care about "use value"—how their homes can generate income *now*. Dwellings can be designed, without any appreciable increase in size, to permit a portion of the home to be cordoned off for either an income-producing business activity or for rent or sublet (without necessarily adding a kitchen). Even at densities up to 35–40 dwelling units per acre, it is still possible to provide ground-floor entries with a front door maintaining the "proper" street appearance and a separate back or side door for commercial use. The presence of alleys can further segregate the uses. If we need at all to look to our past for models, architects can find inspiration in early pioneer and urban immigrant communities. Models for such dwellings already exist in the Boston area. Even today's Third World offers examples of thriving

entrepreneurial neighborhoods from which we can borrow. And of course, many of us grew up in a time not long past, when such diverse uses were regularly integrated within urban neighborhoods, blocks, and dwellings out of necessity, offering rich opportunities with little complaint or sense of impropriety.

There were good reasons at the turn of the last century for muckrakers and social reformers to see their factory districts as unhealthy, polluting, and disease-ridden neighborhoods. But over the remainder of this century, the gradual and systematic purging of lower-income livelihoods from our neighborhoods eventually became a means to separate classes and races. In the process of "sanitizing" the city, not only were the poor relegated to their own zones, but those zones were also denied their economic lifeblood. In their quest to "domesticate" low-income neighborhoods, the architects known as the New Urbanists, in collusion with HUD and its HOPE VI program, are perpetuating the tradition of displacing the poor. Worse, they are imposing restrictive architectural and planning straitjackets onto those who are privileged to remain, preventing them from engaging in forms of economic self-improvement. As we turn from the 20th to the 21st century, we need more sensitive policies that reflect today's cleaner means of manually producing goods and services, particularly at the micro-scales of the home, block, and neighborhood. In this way we may be able to reinstate a stable foundation for working-class communities that allows them to raise their families with dignity, confidence, and greater self-reliance. ■■■

**1 2 Live-work housing in East Oakland, CA: Asian-American appliance repair shop and Hispanic-American grocery, attached to vendors' homes**

**3 4 5 Hismen Hin-Nu Terrace, East Oakland: Housing above ground-floor shops and market hall for vendors and start-up businesses**

**6 Neighborhood in Hanoi, Vietnam: Entrepreneurship encouraged by ground-floor retail and manufacturing**



# Don't Blame Washington

## Suburban sprawl and state leadership

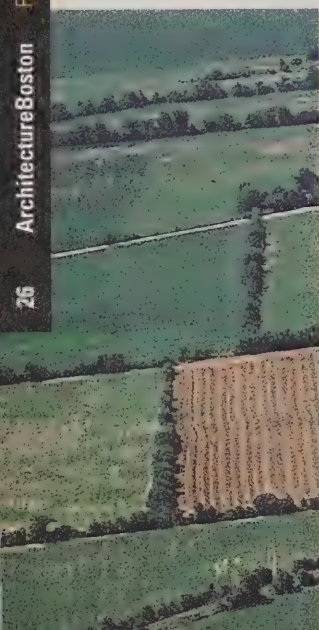
by Michael S. Dukakis, Hon. BSA

**Urban sprawl and its devastating effects** on older urban communities like Boston's ring cities are back in the news. In fact, thanks to the vice-president of the United States, they may well become an issue in the presidential campaign of the year 2000.


But urban sprawl did not happen spontaneously or by accident. It happened because federal and state policies in the post-World War II era virtually invited residents and businesses in cities like Boston, Chelsea, Everett, Somerville, and Revere to leave town. The federal interstate highway system—with its irresistible 90 percent subsidies, billions for airport expansion, and crumbs for public transportation—made it all but impossible for central and ring cities to resist the rush to suburbia.

But it was the states that unwittingly set the stage for the suburban explosion that has engulfed urban America for the past 50 years and turned the suburban dream into a nightmare that now has us scratching our heads and wondering what we do with expressways that are parking lots at five in the afternoon. And it is the states that are going to have to provide the leadership that can restore and revitalize urban America.

Understanding how and why this happened is the first step in shaping new policies that can reverse the damage we have done. And what happened in Boston and Massachusetts is fairly typical of what has happened—and is continuing to happen—in too many states and metropolitan areas across the country.





An aerial photograph showing a sprawling suburban residential development. The houses are arranged in a grid-like pattern with winding streets. A large, green golf course is visible in the center of the development, surrounded by trees and open space. The overall scene depicts a typical mid-20th-century suburban landscape.

The United States experienced a surge of growth after World War II quite unlike any we had experienced at any previous time in American history. Fueled by the return of millions of GIs from far-flung war zones and the pent-up demand of a country that had fought its way through the Great Depression and then five years of a wartime economy, the resulting boom accomplished much more than lifting millions of American families out of poverty. It also produced a huge demand for new and better housing, preferably away from urban slums and out in the country where people could have their own little houses with a quarter-acre of grass and trees and a barbecue in the back yard.

Federal Housing Administration and Veterans Administration mortgages in those days carried interest rates from 4 to 4.5 percent. New and relatively inexpensive cars flooded the market. The suburban explosion was on its way. Most of us didn't bother to stop, look, and listen to what was about to happen to us. Instead, we decided that public policies had to get in step with the market forces that were driving the process. Without really knowing what we were doing or understanding the consequences of our decisions, virtually every state in America signed on to policies that encouraged urban sprawl and accelerated the decline of our older urban communities.

We built highways that paved the way for disinvestment in our cities. We began locating community-college campuses in suburban locations, not in the



heart of our older urban communities where they could have served as the centerpiece of downtown revitalization. State policies for providing school and other assistance made little or no effort to equalize the huge differences in wealth between cities and suburbs.

State water and sewer grants were given out indiscriminately to cities and suburbs alike. In too many cases that money supported more and more suburban sprawl, while older systems like Boston's and its ring cities' were left with deteriorating underground networks that quite literally included hollowed-out logs that had been installed in the 19th century. Law enforcement experts told us that we were wasting our time and money on neighborhood cops walking neighborhood beats and that modern policing required them to get off the beat and into cars that virtually guaranteed that they would never get to know the people they were supposed to be serving. And state regulatory policies reflected an unwitting but devastating bias against urban residents and their communities that continues to this day. Just look at auto insurance rates in Massachusetts. Who pays by far the most for their coverage? Urban residents, of course.

Curiously, the mayors and business and civic leaders of our cities did not march up to their state capitals and demand an end to these policies that were destroying their communities. Instead, they began looking to Washington and to presidents and the Congress for help. Washington certainly tried. First, federally subsidized public housing gave us disastrous projects like Pruitt-Igoe and Cabrini-Green. Then came federally funded urban renewal, followed by Model Cities, followed by urban development action grants, but none of them seemed to be able to stem the tide. Instead, we created huge sprawling metropolitan areas like greater Los Angeles, where gridlock on the freeway system became a daily occurrence, and school kids were kept indoors dozens of times each school year because of smog alerts.

By the 1960s and early 1970s, it should have been apparent to anyone with half a brain that this process had to be slowed and reversed. Fortunately, Massachusetts was among the few states that did so.

Governor Sargent made one of the most courageous decisions any governor has ever made in this state when he killed the so-called Master Highway plan that would have covered Boston with asphalt. Tip O'Neill and our congressional delegation made it possible for us to use those interstate highway dollars

for mass transit and, thanks to them, we now have the best mass transit and commuter rail system in the country.

Working with our cities and towns in the mid-1970s, we put together the first serious state urban policy in the country, and Boston and Lowell are shining examples of that policy in action.

Now it is time for the Commonwealth to do for its ring cities and neighborhoods what we have been able to do for Boston and Lowell. The state's economy is strong. Housing prices are going through the roof. The ring cities can offer affordable housing and the proximity to working families, to public transportation, and to the airport that are increasingly important to many Massachusetts companies.

Fortunately, state government is beginning to pay attention to the needs and possibilities in these communities. Chelsea, for example, is undergoing a mini-revival thanks to enlightened state policies. Every child in Chelsea is studying in a brand-new school, paid for primarily by the state's taxpayers. A new courthouse is going up in downtown Chelsea. Nearby, a lovely adaptive reuse of the federal post office is the new home of a branch of Bunker Hill Community College. The new Massachusetts Technology Center, housing state agencies and Department of Revenue processing operations, brought 1,500 state employees to Chelsea. The city is on its way to a much brighter future.

But there is more—much more—that the Commonwealth can do to create jobs and economic opportunity in the Roxbury and Dorchester sections of Boston and in the other ring communities.

And make no mistake about it. It is the Commonwealth, working with the political and business and neighborhood activists of these communities, that must provide the leadership. For it is the Commonwealth that will make infrastructure decisions like the Urban Ring to serve more neighborhoods with public transportation. And it is the Commonwealth that will provide the resources to improve schools, decide how the location of state facilities can revive downtowns, and encourage the business community to follow with investment and jobs.

Can we do it? Of course, we can. But it will take leadership, tenacity, and an understanding of the absolutely crucial role that state government must play in the process. ■■■

Michael S. Dukakis is the former governor of Massachusetts. He is currently Distinguished Professor of Political Science at Northeastern University, visiting professor at the School of Public Policy at UCLA, and vice-chair of the new Amtrak Reform Board.



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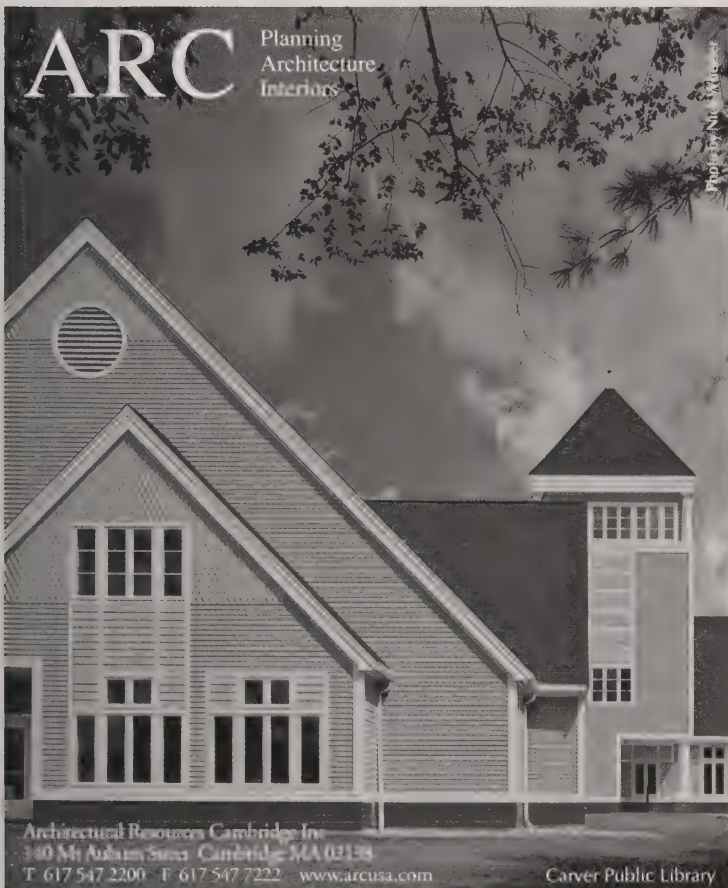
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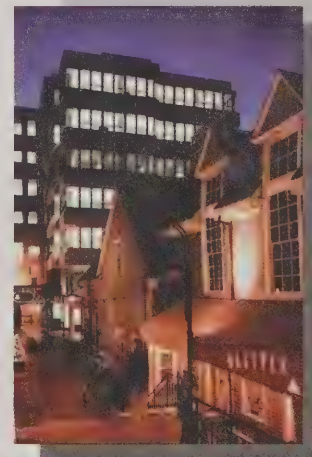
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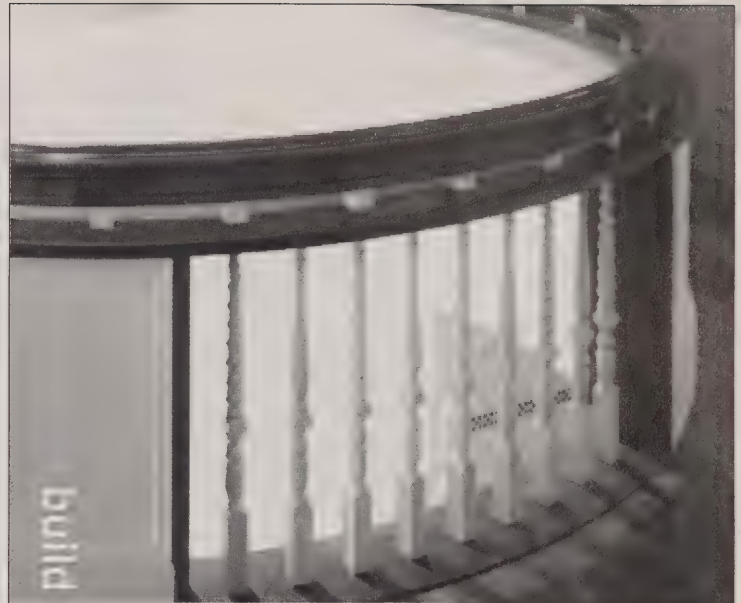
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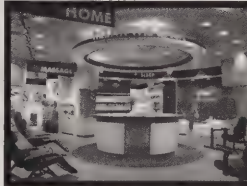
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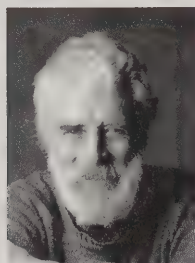
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# Under Cover

Malcolm Wells talks with Andrew St. John AIA



Malcolm Wells



Andrew St. John

**Malcolm Wells is one** of those rare people who live by a set of unvarying principles. This has far-reaching ramifications for him as a person and as an architect, governing how he lives, how he works, and the kinds of commissions he will accept.

His architectural life's work has been the advocacy of earth-sheltered housing. He has written a number of books on the practice, including how-to construction guides, design portfolios of earth-sheltered buildings, and visionary work on a world of buildings covered with plants. A remarkably prolific designer, artist, and writer, Malcolm lives with his wife, Karen, on Cape Cod. Together they work in the Underground Gallery, itself an earth-sheltered building.

Since the counterculture '60s, Malcolm has been an icon of the environmental movement, and his work is now regarded as a model of green, sustainable practice. Sustainable design addresses the "triple bottom line" of the environmental and social as well as economic aspects of development. Malcolm's designs are energy-efficient and affordable over the long run, and they reflect his efforts to repair the damage wrought by uncontrolled development. His approach is pragmatic, based on nature's proven capability to heal itself and on the excellent thermal properties of earth.

During a recent conversation at the Underground Gallery, we talked a little about the spiritual dimension of his work. Malcolm shied away from describing his work as based in reverence for the earth, although he was quite clear that his drive to repair the earth comes from his feeling for the intricacies and wonders of nature. He's not interested in engaging in a debate over the "right" way to do his work. From his point of view, he builds houses and draws, as he says, a blanket of earth over them. It's refreshing to find a dedicated person who doesn't need to know how many sustainable angels can stand on the head of the environmentally-correct pin.

Andrew St. John AIA



**St. John:** What led you to underground architecture? It's an unusual expertise and you've developed an unusual professional path.

**Wells:** I had started practicing in New Jersey in 1953. I never went to architectural school—I just had a couple of years of civil engineering. And after World War II, the New Jersey Architectural Registration Board was pretty lax. After I'd had a few years experience, they gave me a half-hour oral exam, and I was registered. My big client was RCA. I did factories and office buildings for them for about 10 years and made a lot of money. And then one day in the '60s I woke up and saw that I'd been spreading asphalt all over creation.

**St. John:** What pushed you toward environmentalism?

**Wells:** It was already gathering speed in the '60s. I started to look into underground architecture and decided that it had a lot of potential—it's warm and dry and energy-efficient. And it's permanent. Then, with the Arab oil embargo, people started talking about solar energy, which led to a wider interest in underground architecture. So I wrote and sold a lot of books on underground buildings and thought that would go on forever. But popular interest in those issues peaked. By 1982 or 1983 it was gone. Oil prices were down. I managed to get a lot of people to build underground, but relatively speaking, they're few and far between.

**St. John:** Do you maintain an active practice in anything besides underground buildings?





Drawings courtesy Malcolm Wells

**Wells:** I tried to do nothing but underground designs. But I don't have any active practice at all now. I gave up my license a few years ago—I just didn't renew it. Now I'm a consultant—I do initial designs for people and then encourage them to hire their own architects. And I give a lot of lectures, mostly at architecture schools.

**St. John:** You sent me an article written by someone you'd met at one of the schools. This person had taken environmental concepts and abstracted them so completely that it was impossible to understand what he was talking about.

**Wells:** Some people try to turn it into another language. It's a lot easier to talk about it than to do it.

**St. John:** Encouraging people to build underground is your primary aim. How do you do it? How do you push the environmental issues?

**Wells:** I have a lot of correspondence with people—often they're people who write to me because they've read my books and they want to know more. Every day I send eight or ten letters, telling people how to get started and why they should build underground.

**St. John:** When I was writing the *Sourcebook for Sustainable Design* [for the Boston Society of Architects], I was one of your correspondents. You wrote that you practiced with no computer, no copier, no fax. I just noticed a computer in the other room, so it seems you've made some bow to technology since then.

**Wells:** That's my wife's machine—I've never touched a computer, and I never will. I have a Web page [[www.solarnet.org/MalcolmWells](http://www.solarnet.org/MalcolmWells)], but I didn't put it there. But what led you to write the *Sourcebook*? How did you get interested in these issues?

**St. John:** As a practicing architect, I spent years looking for ways to build with greater environmental awareness. A number of us in a group called Architects for Social Responsibility were frustrated with the difficulty of finding "least harmful" materials. We started to do some research and it eventually grew into the book. Now there's much wider acceptance of what we call sustainable design and sustainable practice. And I think we're beginning to see an even broader approach—Americans already understand economic responsibility, and now they're learning to include environmental responsibility and social responsibility.

**Wells:** I think our motives are becoming a little less self-centered. We have a clearer understanding of the living world out there.

**St. John:** But people continue to get stuck on the technology of "environmental architecture." They always want to know, What materials should I use? What's the best way to do it? Right now I'm looking around your studio, and I see that your columns are undressed tree trunks.

**Wells:** The trees used to live here, but they were in the way. I did this to show that you can build with steel, concrete, wood—all sorts of different materials. This is a steel deck overhead with concrete on it. Architects love concrete. Most people hate it. But it works well in these buildings, and it holds a lot of heat energy.

**St. John:** Let's digress for a moment into the technical issues. What do you use for a waterproof membrane?



**Wells:** It's a butyl sheet,  $\frac{1}{16}$  of an inch thick. That's always criticized at first for being a high-energy petroleum product. But I try to justify it by the longevity of the building, which, if it lasts for a couple hundred years, makes the petroleum use negligible. Starting from the top of the roof, I have the plants and soil, and then six inches of Styrofoam insulation, which protects the membrane. And then there's the concrete and the steel. So I don't think much is going to happen to it. I use the same materials on the walls. I never use parapets at the edges of the roof. I think it's best to let the earth slip down and drip off—it holds itself at its natural slope.

**St. John:** Have you encountered resistance to the concept of underground structures?

**Wells:** Oh, yes. That's the whole problem, I think, more than the added cost of 10 or 15 percent. People don't like that *word*—they come here to the Underground Gallery, and at first they look a little frightened, and then they realize that it's just like any other building.

**St. John:** You've used some other terms—like “earth-sheltered.”

**Wells:** Yes, but why kid around by calling it “earth-sheltered” or “terra-sol” architecture or whatever? We're underground; I want people to know that. People think sometimes that by putting earth around a building—berms—that they're underground. Or they think that if they live in a basement apartment, they're underground. To me, you have to have the ground above you for this to really work. Because it's the green footprint that interests me—what is seen from the sky.

**St. John:** So your definition of underground architecture would be a building with enough earth on top to grow things.

**Wells:** Yes. I have three feet here, but if I had to do it again, I'd put about 10 feet of earth up there, so it could be a truly natural habitat for all the plants.

**St. John:** How does that affect the groundwater? Wouldn't a building with only three feet of cover actually cut off the rain's access to the groundwater?

**Wells:** It interrupts it. But when the rain falls on the roof, it percolates through the soil until it hits the waterproof membrane. Then it runs out to the edge of the roof and drips into a giant, pebble-filled trench. So it finds its way into the earth, and it's been cleaned up quite a bit just by going through that rooftop filter. We never irrigate. Whatever lives up there, lives, and that's it. It's all volunteer stuff.

**St. John:** So you didn't plant anything.

**Wells:** No.

**St. John:** Tell me what's up there.

**Wells:** A couple of pine trees, now about four feet tall. Some shrubs I can't identify. Various grasses that have blown in. And of course, the wisteria has grown up from behind, but I guess that's cheating—we wanted it to grow up there. Wisteria is such a fierce demolition expert in most buildings. But here, it just spreads and apparently doesn't do any harm. And we get beautiful purple flowers on the roof.

**St. John:** Have you ever tried to introduce underground buildings into more urban situations?

**Wells:** I haven't gotten anywhere with that, but I think it has to happen eventually. We can't just keep asphaltting everything. There are, of course, underground parking garages in the centers of many cities—like the Boston Common Garage and Post Office Square.

**St. John:** What about commercial or institutional buildings?

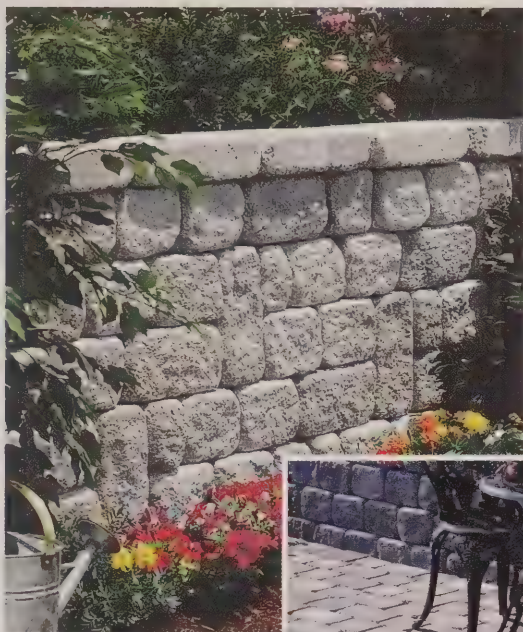
**Wells:** Underground university libraries are fairly common. And there are more military and government buildings underground than we would ever imagine, but I don't know anything about them. Other applications haven't really caught on—it's mostly housing.

**St. John:** I have to ask you the most important question: Have you had any leaks?

**Wells:** Not yet. Not in 27 years, which is the age of my first underground building—my own office down in New Jersey. The things that hurt building materials are sunlight, freezing, weather exposure, climactic stresses. And they don't happen when the building's earth-covered. ■■■







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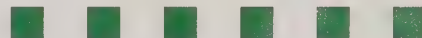
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# Two Views

Jack Clarke and Margaret Dyson

**Call it another example of the Law of Unintended Consequences. With increasing concern about the quality of public education, many Massachusetts cities and towns have welcomed a state program that funds school construction. Despite the program's good intentions, its inadvertent results include the loss of open space and the proliferation of sprawl.**

**Every week more of it disappears**—all across the state, municipal open space is being developed. It is part of a revolving door situation in which we spend millions of dollars each year to buy open space, but allow hundreds of acres of open space to be developed. In one door—out the other!

Parks, fields, tracts of woodland and wetland—providing exercise, exploration, or solitude, and treasured by all who see and use them—are being given away for the construction of new schools.

We recently celebrated Earth Day '99 by treasuring these open spaces, but we often take them for granted. Often we don't know who manages this municipal land. The water department? The conservation commission? The selectmen? Usually we become concerned and involved only when these special places are threatened. By then, it's often too late.

A bill before the state legislature (H.2046) filed by Representative Pam Resor of Acton (now a state senator) could change all that: It could help protect our conservation and recreation lands and the myriad benefits they provide, from wildlife habitat, to water supply, to flood control, to community character.

Unfortunately, much of the open space we enjoy for conservation and recreation is not legally protected from development. Obviously, private lands can be sold and developed, unless there are strict conservation restrictions in place. But many people don't know that municipal open space is vulnerable. Under Article 97 of the Massachusetts Constitution, our so-called "Environmental Bill of Rights," municipal land held for conservation purposes can be converted to other uses.

The most common demand for the conversion of municipal open space is for the construction of new schools. As the need for new classrooms and playing fields increases, municipal officials routinely look for "cheap" and "available" land. They often first turn to "unused" woodlands or fields that are already owned by the municipality—conservation and recreation lands.

All that is needed for the transfer to occur is approval at the local level and a two-thirds vote of the legislature—surprisingly simple criteria to meet. Local support for new schools, funded with state assistance, is tremendous, and legislative support for local issues is usually unanimous ("If I support your bill you'll support mine, right?").

You can't blame local voters. The state provides ample funds for the construction of new school buildings, but not for the renovation of old buildings and not for the purchase of land for the schools. The state also mandates minimum acreage requirements—20, 15, and 10 acres for high, middle, and elementary schools respectively.

You can't blame legislators. Almost every municipality is or soon will be facing the need to expand or improve their school facilities. There is no reward for environmentally conscious boat-rockers.

The Article 97 bill before the legislature would require a stricter process of deliberation to bring an end to the rubber-stamp process in the legislature, and would mandate a no-net-loss of open space, requiring the purchase and protection of land of equal or greater value than the converted parcel.

The proposed bill would complement Governor Cellucci's recent blue-ribbon panel recommendations that state funding for land protection be withheld from any municipality that transfers conservation land for development without express support from the administration.

Together, the bill and the recommendation would curtail the senseless loss of our most precious common resource—open space. ■ ■ ■

## Jack Clarke

**is the advocacy director for the Massachusetts Audubon Society and chairman of the city of Gloucester planning board.**





### Margaret Dyson

is the president  
of Historic  
Massachusetts.  
Jean Hall Koopman  
contributed  
research to this  
article.

### Massachusetts' School Building Assistance (SBA)

program was created to help communities meet increased school facilities needs. However, in many cities and towns, the implementation of the program has become nothing less than state-subsidized sprawl, encouraging the abandonment of perfectly sound school buildings and the loss of our parks and conservation lands to construction sites. All this because, as everyone knows, the state won't fund renovations. Or will they?

The simple answer is the state *can* fund school renovations—even if the buildings are old, have wood framing, or are on small sites, even if the cost of renovation exceeds 50 percent of new construction costs.

In fiscal year 1996, 33 of the 44 of the SBA projects were renovations or renovations combined with additions; in 1997 that number grew to 44 of 59 projects. Each of these projects was reimbursed to the full percentage set by the Massachusetts Legislature—percentages that are constant for new construction or renovation.

Why, then, do so many school officials, local leaders, and even building professionals believe that only new construction can receive funding? Some communities report that state Department of Education staff members discourage renovation proposals.

Many of the misunderstandings stem from confusion about what the state requires versus what the school construction industry presents as “standards.” The Department of Education staff has cited these standards—provided by the Council of Educational Facilities Planners International (CEFPI), a private, Scottsdale, Arizona-based group—in newspaper articles and schools conferences. The standards are sometimes misconstrued as state law. These are the source of acreage “requirements” and the

“50-percent rule” that recommends against any renovation project that exceeds 50 percent of the cost of new construction. Neither standard appears in Massachusetts law or regulations. However, a reference to the 50-percent rule does appear in the Department of Education's application, effectively discouraging renovation proposals before they start.

The Commonwealth has adopted CEFPI's classroom size guidelines for grades 1 through 8 in its regulations—a 900 to 1,000 square-foot classroom, with a 5-percent variance, to accommodate approximately 25 students. Requirements for computer stations in classrooms add a burden to smaller rooms in older schools, but in a time when the educational philosophy is urging schools to decrease the number of students per class, particularly for special-needs classes, building larger classrooms is not a necessity. Many of the older classrooms in Massachusetts measure approximately 750 to 850 square feet, which is large enough to accommodate the desired class size.

There is also a misconception that state money can't be used to renovate buildings with wood framing, but several successful renovations of wood-framed structures have been funded. The Massachusetts Building Code allows wood framing. In October of 1997, the Commissioner of Education issued a notice that design specifications for expansion and renovation of existing buildings are acceptable if prepared in accordance with the Building Code.

There is also a sense that old buildings, particularly ones with wood framing, are not safe. But a review of 6,200 incidents recorded by the US Fire Administration in elementary and secondary schools for the years 1991 through 1995 shows a similar—even slightly lower—number of injuries in wood-frame facilities when compared to “protected fire resistive” facilities.

Through the talent and commitment of architects, designers, and educators, renovated schools can be outstanding educational facilities using School Building Assistance funds. Existing schools provide a link to the past for community residents, protect open space, and discourage sprawl. Building professionals have a unique opportunity to work with communities to achieve these broader public objectives by learning how state funds can provide great facilities in recycled buildings. ■■■



# Constructive Advice

## Sustainable wood, defensible choices

by Richard Moore AIA



Photo: Paul Levelle

**Quabbin Forest, certified by Smart Wood; herringbone floor with certified wood**

**Can current corporate forestry practices provide** enough wood for the construction industry into the next century? The unequivocal answer is yes—but not without continuing the destruction of earth's fragile eco-system. The larger question for designers and consumers is: Do we want to be part of this destruction, or do we want to ensure that we are helping to save our planet?

Today's designer has many options that avoid the destructive practices of the conventional lumber industry. The three primary choices are: rediscovered wood, green wood products, and certified wood. The terms "rediscovered," "green," and "certified" can be confusing because they are often erroneously used interchangeably. But precision in the definitions is helpful: Rediscovered wood has been salvaged from old buildings, demolition landfills, or fallen trees. Green wood products are reconstituted products that have recycled content, low toxicity, or "engineered" qualities (meaning that they are fabricated from small, easily renewable trees into superior structural products). Certified wood is cut from forests managed with sustainable practices that have been certified by an independent third party. Moreover, rediscovered wood can also be "third-party certified."

**Rediscovered wood:** Environmentally, these woods are the soundest choice for saving forests. They come from demolition projects, urban tree salvage (dead, fallen, or diseased trees), unproductive orchards, and reclaimed wood from demolition landfills. You could probably identify recycled, painted barn wood, but could you distinguish between recycled, old-growth heart pine and new old-growth heart pine after milling? Could you determine if your urban tree salvage wood came from a development clearing? How would you know if your recycled beams came from an historic structure or had lead-paint residues? Are you that smart? Without verification, these questions are hard to answer. Demanding certification is a prudent practice in these selections, especially with the high cost premiums for these products. Smart Wood, a program of the non-profit Rainforest Alliance, certifies companies that market rediscovered wood. A Web site ([www.smartwood.org](http://www.smartwood.org)) describes the Smart Wood certification guidelines and lists US suppliers.

**Green wood products:** These products include formaldehyde-free composite wood panels, arsenic-free pressure-treated lumber, engineered structural wood, and plastic lumber. These are traditional products with a "green edge."



Most of these products are not certified, although one certified particleboard is now available; more certification will undoubtedly come with greater public demands for accountability. Presently these products are marketed as “environmentally clean”—but by their manufacturers’ definitions. Their wood content, for example, may come from trees harvested from a monoculture forest, which decreases wildlife diversity and increases pest populations. However, green wood products generally excel in the efficient use of small, second-growth trees of lesser-used species, such as aspen and poplar. This reduces the demand on familiar species like Douglas fir and southern pine and saves our old-growth giants. In fact, the engineered-wood industry, which produces I-joists, parallel- and laminated-strand lumber, and oriented-strand board (OSB) will do more to save our old-growth forests than any other factor; it currently accounts for 5 percent of the US lumber market and is steadily rising.

Green wood products also excel in recycling waste material. Medium-density fiberboard (MDF) consists of waste sawdust and can be fabricated without formaldehyde. This is an ideal material for cabinets, furniture, and moldings in environmentally sensitive areas such as hospitals, schools, and nursing homes. Plastic lumber is produced from 100-percent-recycled plastic without toxic or corrosive chemicals. Boardwalks, decks, and outdoor furniture are some of the uses of this low-maintenance, arsenic-free material.

**Certified wood:** This is the newcomer to the market. This promising conservation tool was started by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) in 1993 to establish international forest management standards. The FSC accredits and monitors certification organizations, which must meet strict standards that strengthen local economies and protect forest ecosystems, water quality, and wildlife habitats. (For more information, see the FSC Web site: [www.fscus.org](http://www.fscus.org).) The two FSC-certified organizations in the US are the non-profit Smart Wood and the for-profit Scientific Certification Systems (SCS). To date, 3.6 million acres of US forest land have been certified; a third of that is located in the Northeast.

Certified wood is available in many products such as veneers, flooring, moldings, furniture, and structural lumber. The Certified Forest Products Council has a Web site ([www.certified.org](http://www.certified.org)) offering product searches, and the Goodwood Alliance has produced a Good Wood Directory ([www.goodwood.org](http://www.goodwood.org)) that

lists sources, manufacturers, and distributors. The downside to certification is the cost premium, about 5 to 10 percent over conventional lumber. But as the demand for this lumber goes up, the premiums will be reduced, and eventually certified wood will be competitive. Architects can encourage this trend by educating our clients and the public.

What is the “greenest” choice of the three options? Running calculations of the embodied energy of each is certainly possible but, practically speaking, the best choice depends upon application and availability. For a rustic atmosphere in a restaurant, antique, distressed white pine might be the answer. Recycled plastic lumber might be the best choice for boardwalks over environmentally sensitive wetlands. Rather than cutting an old-growth giant for an 11x20 beam, an engineered Parallam beam made from small, second-growth poplars might suffice. For that special conference table, mahogany might be the preferred species—just be sure it’s certified.

The forest industry uses many terms—“urban tree salvage,” “selective harvesting,” “environmentally friendly”—that can make selection of these products daunting. Material safety data sheets and product literature do not necessarily reveal the actual source of the wood. Most often, even the suppliers do not know. The best tool is certification, which can trace even a 2x4 from the supplier to the mill and back to the forest operations through its chain-of-custody certificate. Every piece of certified wood is stamped. There is no uncertainty.

These sustainable options are the future. The Seven Island Land Company forest in Maine was first to be certified in New England. The Quabbin forest in Massachusetts, operated by the Metropolitan District Commission, has 60,000 certified acres. Geoff Jones from the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests says, “Green certification is a natural evolutionary response to public and professional concerns.” His organization manages the Monadnock forest, a recently certified forest operation. Certification is our assurance that our product specifications are in line with our ethics. With greater market share and greater market awareness, the cost penalties of sustainable options will become negligible. And then both architects and their clients will have the satisfaction of knowing that the right wood for the project will also be the right wood for the environment. ■■■

Richard Moore AIA practices sustainable architecture in Brookline, MA. The recipient of a 1997 BSA Sustainable Design Award, he has presented numerous “green” workshops for Build Boston, AIA/NH, CSI/Boston, and ASID. He will offer a sustainable-woods workshop at Build Boston this November.





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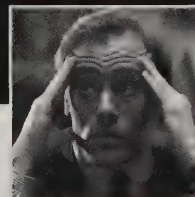
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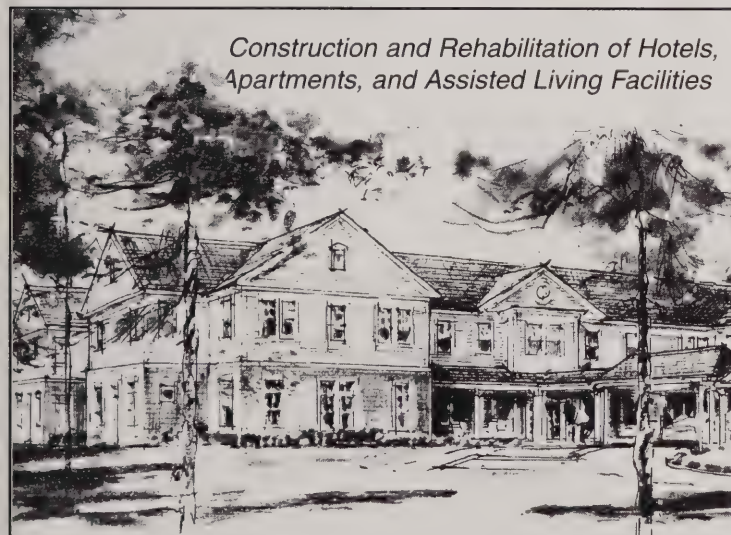


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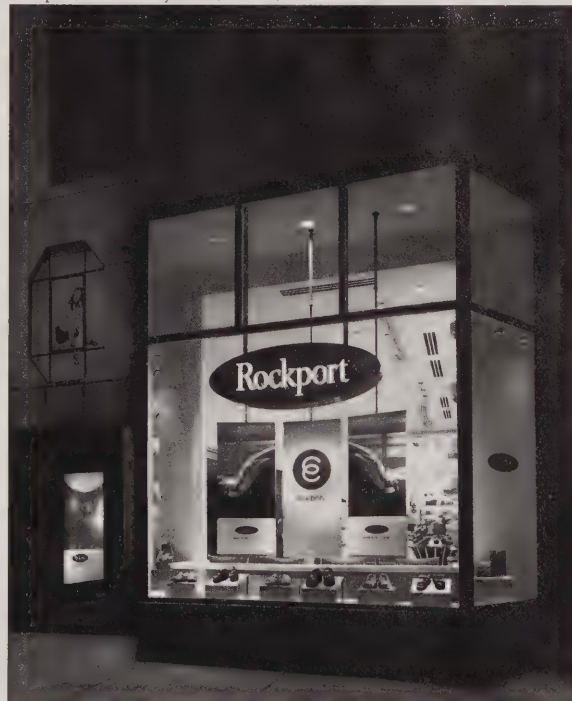
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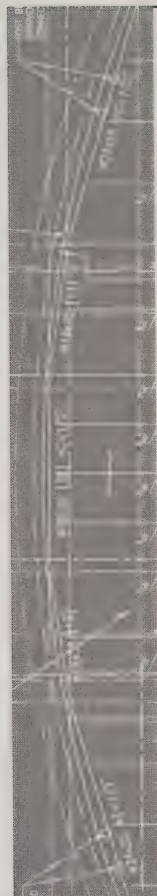
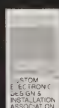
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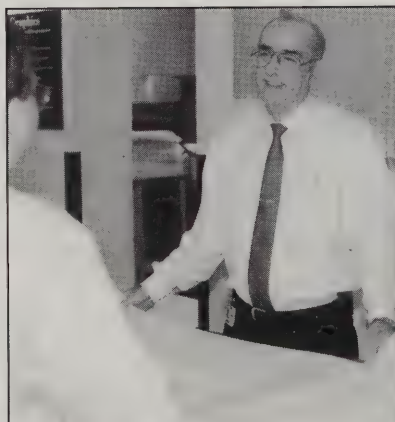
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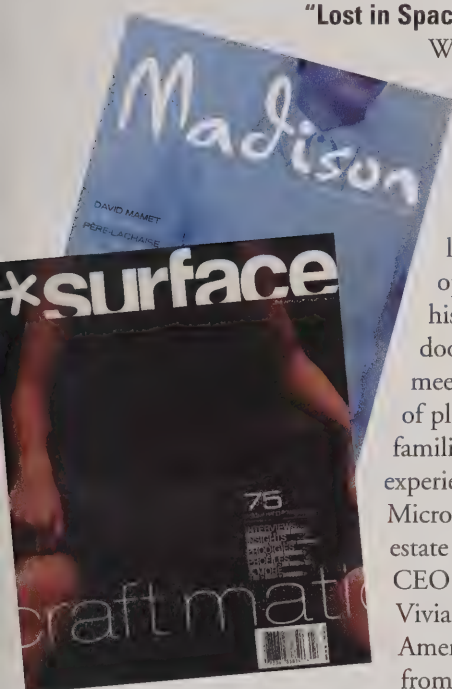
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# Covering the Issues

Periodical roundup  
by Gretchen Schneider



**"Lost in Space" returns...** "Will This Open Space Work?" asks Jacqueline Vischer in her headline question in the May-June issue of *Harvard Business Review*. This case study poses a hypothetical situation in which a "CEO wants to increase collaboration and cut costs with an open-plan work space," even though his "knowledge workers" want walls, doors, and privacy. After many employee meetings, the architect's on her third set of plans—which to choose? Sound familiar? Here, five real people with real experience offer real advice. Included are Microsoft's Nick MacPhee, Boston real-estate developer Donald Chiofaro, Alcoa CEO Paul O'Neill, Carnegie Mellon's Vivian Loftness, and Steelcase North America's David Lathrop. Opinions range from "space is as critical to productivity as technology is" to "you may succeed in business despite your space, but you seldom succeed because of it." Though some do disagree, general advice follows the lesson of the Chiat/Day redesign fiasco: Keep private space. A valuable discussion at the intersection of business and architecture.

**In your spare time...** Have you sensed something's missing at your magazine stand? Someone thinks so, judging from the recent explosion of genre-popping design mags. All cut across the popular arts—film, theater, fashion, music, interior design, industrial design, architecture—obliterating any distinctions between high and low culture en route. And all are stunningly designed objects in themselves. San Francisco-based *LIMN* offers the meatiest content; issue No. 3 explores "the minds behind design," a/k/a patrons. This self-proclaimed "Magazine of International Design" attempts to broadly "explore things the market can't." *\*Surface* is another Bay-Area publication. Unfortunate asterisk use makes it appear a *Wallpaper\** wannabe, yet closer inspection reveals fashion design is at its heart; architecture is

only an editorial prop. *Flaunt* ranks as the most image-driven, substance-sparse of the crowd. Though initially promising, its architecture and related design articles remain superficial—celebrity garden-design features and well-photographed lists of cool-objects-to-own. New York's *Madison* is simple, elegant, and sophisticated. The text assumes an educated reader, as in April's discussion of Reyner Banham's interdisciplinary focus on the Los Angeles Case Study houses and American industrial architecture. *LIMN* excepted, none of these will tax your brain, perhaps rendering them perfect for your next Logan layover.

**New York al fresco...** The Italian *Abitare* devotes its entire May 1999 issue to a comprehensive celebration and examination of New York at the end of the 20th century, "in search of emergent rather than existing architecture." The European perspective can be critical but refreshing: "New Yorkers now find that their politically correct, sociologically reconstructed, decriminalized-and-deintellectualized city is once more a pretty good place to live in, though many Europeans would say that the architecture has gone away..." Leading New York architects agree—Holl, Williams and Tsien, Sorkin, and Viñoly among them. The magazine is as dense as the city itself. Does it say anything new? Probably not. Does that diminish its power? Not one iota. Anyone who is passionate about New York or inspired by good, in-depth studies of cities should run to find this one. In a New York minute.

**And while you're at it...** Why stop with one city? *Domus*, *Abitare's* compatriot, devotes its June 1999 issue to American culture. "The main interest of American cities lies in the difference between their 'scale' and the one we are accustomed to think of in Europe," explains Francois Burkhardt in his opening editorial. More than individual buildings, he refers to spaces in-between and the drastic, dramatic shifts between downtown districts and residential ones. He concludes that to restore a "proper balance" would "call for a complete overhaul of urban planning concepts." Not to mention a complete overhaul of the American psyche. Subsequent articles highlight projects in architecture, design, art, graphics, and communication, discussing issues ranging from the *Truman Show* phenomenon to mass-produced, industrial product design. Again, does it offer much that's new? Probably not. But that doesn't detract from the value of this cross-cultural perspective.



Gretchen Schneider has recently moved from Boston to Lexington, KY, where she has joined the architecture faculty at the University of Kentucky.



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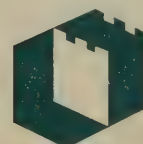
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# Books

## Sidewalk Critic: Lewis Mumford's Writings on New York

Edited by Robert Wojtowicz  
Princeton Architectural  
Press, 1998

Reviewed by Robert Sturgis FAIA

Until his death in 1990, Lewis Mumford was the most influential critic of architecture in this century, both as a prophet and an advocate. Indeed, his advocacy was so successful that he became a prophet of his own success.

In the early 1920s, Mumford championed Patrick Geddes, the English town planner, along with Clarence Stein and Henry Wright, who designed the first American "new towns," which were the models—imperfectly followed—for the Levittowns of the 1950s and '60s. He declared Henry Hobson Richardson and Louis Sullivan the first modern architects, and their successor, Frank Lloyd Wright, as the architect of the century. Of Walter Gropius, he wrote: "His instincts were sound; he realized it was necessary to rebuild both the architect and architecture from the ground up. The courses in the Bauhaus began not with buildings but with the materials and processes and personalities and ideas out of which buildings are formed."

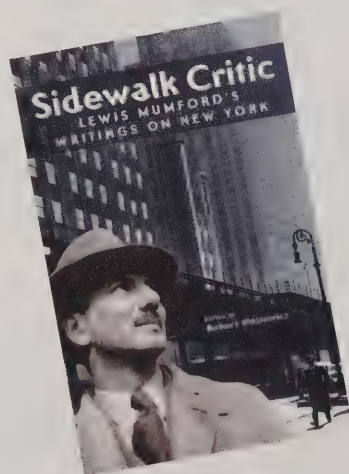
*Sidewalk Critic*, a selection from 10 years of essays for *The New Yorker*, features another story, that of Rockefeller Center. In 1931, Mumford scorned the "tall skyscraper as a businessman's toy," adding, "it was by the canons of Cloudcuckooland that Radio City was designed." An admirer of the Cornell Medical Center (by Coolidge Shepley Bulfinch and Abbott), he allowed that "an attack of appendicitis in the Cornell

Medical Center will be more endurable than an attack of boredom in Radio City."

But a prophet can be fallible. In the mid-'30s, he declared that "the skyscraper period is fast coming to an end," and later that "air conditioning is a passing fad." As Rockefeller Center grew, he praised it with the faintest of damns, admitting: "At last I have something to admire...the great entrance to the new unit on Fifth Avenue...that high, narrow opening with its austere columns...I wondered what plans might be afoot to mar its noble lines."

But there is much more to Lewis Mumford. Surely, the 600 pages of his classic *The City in History* is the noblest of tomes on the human environment—physical, social, and economic—more comprehensive yet more down-to-earth than those by Toynbee and Doxiadis. Can we expect any architecture critic to be more familiar with the sweep of history and the sequences of land use, of how life was actually lived in different eras, with its effects on city form and the layout of streets? Mumford made such observations, great and small, even from the sidewalks of New York.

Robert Sturgis FAIA is an architect in Weston, MA. He chairs the BSA's Regional Design Committee. ■■■



## Hometown

by Tracy Kidder  
Random House, 1999

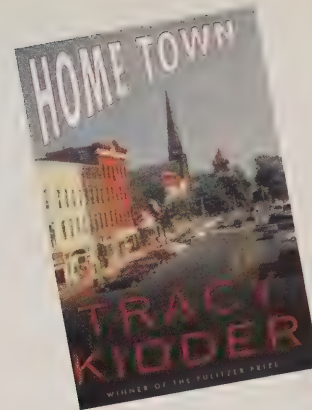
Reviewed by Julianna Waggoner

It is odd to read a book entitled *Hometown*, expecting Andy Griffith and apple pie, and instead find out where the local crack house is. Surprise! This is the semi-seamy underside of Northampton, Massachusetts, seen through the eyes of Tommy O'Connor, a townie born and bred. The home of Smith College, known for its restaurants, gorgeous landscape, and thriving lesbian population, Northampton is a different place with Tommy as a guide.

"Northampton was a town of many happy families," Kidder notes, "whom Tommy had never met." And neither will you. You might, however, find yourself schmoozing with Alan Scheinman, a lawyer with a virulent case of obsessive-compulsive syndrome (and discovering more about his sexual tastes than you might politely ask). The book dwells, well, almost obsessively on Scheinman, but it also offers the reader a sense of compassion for this debilitating illness.

The author's rendering of female characters is more uneven and frustrating. One example is Laura Baumeister, a 27-year-old welfare mother and Smith College student, who struggles to discover her own self-worth in the town's most affluent institution. Laura offers a refreshing perspective on Smithies, but Kidder describes her thoughts in short, disconnected sentences, rather like Spiderman gasping, "Must...reach button...now." Getting into the minds of his female characters seems to be a bit beyond Kidder's reach.

In this light, some have complained that *Hometown* ignores the town's significant lesbian population. Kidder does include lesbians, but in the way an outsider to the gay community, like Tommy O'Connor, would—by frequent mention, but not with familiarity.



The book's title and its misty, pastel cover seem designed to appeal commercially to the current hunger for "Old-Fashioned Community," but they offer a skewed vision of the actual contents. This is not nostalgia. This is a rumination on a contemporary community, including its misfits and felons.

Readers interested in community design will enjoy Kidder's discussion of Plato's ideal city-state of 30,000 souls (about the size of Northampton), and Ebenezer Howard's "garden cities." He offers realistic cautions that architects, as well as other designers and seekers of perfect communities, would do well to heed: "If a place is big enough to provide all the variety that the law-abiding want, it's likely to be big enough to harbor most varieties of human nature unrestrained." It's an interesting concept for rigid, controlling architects: Perfect design is not enough. Kidder consistently makes the case for morality, compassion, and humor to make up the balance; these are the elements of what he believes makes Northampton work.

*Hometown* is worthy of serious reading, particularly if you're familiar with Northampton. However, Kidder's style can sometimes feel like being in a relationship that you wish was a bit more intimate. You'll find yourself wondering what's happening between the lines.

Julianna Waggoner is the marketing director for Dietz & Company Architects in Springfield, MA. She performs standup comedy and comedy improvisation with the troupe The Villa Jidiots. She is grateful to have been transplanted from New Jersey to the Northampton area 20 years ago. ■■■



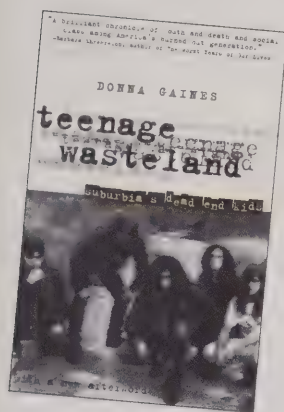
## Teenage Wasteland Suburbia's Dead End Kids

by Donna Gaines

University of

Chicago Press, 1999

Reviewed by Cynthia Griffin



Street-smart and savvy Donna Gaines chronicles the lives of Bergenfield, New Jersey's teenage "burnouts." After four teenagers committed suicide together in March, 1981, the town struggled to figure out what went wrong and who was to blame. The news media, with their overly zealous manipulative coverage, were quick to label the kids as "troubled losers." In contrast, Gaines sheds light on the poorly understood yet over-analyzed culture of today's suburban teenager. With its updated afterword, this is as vital a book for today's reader as it was in its original 1990 edition.

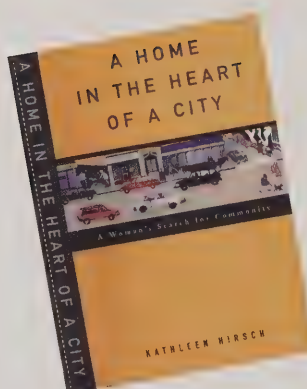
What makes some kids in suburban towns become burnouts? Why are some defeated, while other alienated kids survive? How do they find respect when the world around them does not take them seriously and has cast them aside? *Teenage Wasteland* offers an analysis, not through psychological and medical models, but rather through the voice of the young people describing their own experience. It is the voice of a new and very different generation.

Gaines befriends several of Bergenfield's teens and pulls us into contemporary youth culture. We hear firsthand about the restrictions of suburbia and the lack of mobility—physical, economic, and social. During the 1980s, as economic opportunities diminished and schools strove to take advantage of special-education funding, kids felt labeled and cast aside. Adults were viewed not as allies, but rather as the ones who always see the worst. As teens became convinced that adults were not prepared to listen or to help them, they often tried to address the problems themselves.

Gaines travels with her comrades to "the Building," an old abandoned warehouse that the teens have taken as their own. It is here that the kids set the rules. Music is discussed and debated: Heavy Metal, Hard Core. Music is often their inspiration, their religion. It is where they find their faith and power. Their heroes are the musicians who have "made it," the people who have risen and still speak the words, thoughts, and feelings of their generation.

Gaines' writing style is multifaceted as she weaves teenage experience with sociological findings. Her sensitivity and willingness to truly listen allow her to hear what the teens are actually saying. She offers a "why" behind the music and the actions. With a new afterward in this release, she reflects on the homicides of today and builds upon her recognition of the resilience and goodness of young people. They are a rising generation, more multicultural, diverse, and flexible than any before. These strengths are more easily recognized and built upon when adults offer kids real opportunities, allowing them to grow and thrive in a culture of respect.

Cynthia Griffin is the co-founder and co-director of The Family Network, Inc., a non-profit organization that offers support, education, and resources to parents and other caregivers on the North Shore of Massachusetts. ■■■■



## A Home in the Heart of a City

by Kathleen Hirsch

North Point Press, 1998

Reviewed by Helen F. Smith

Kathleen Hirsch says that when she moved into Jamaica Plain in 1990, she had two questions: "Could a city neighborhood become a place that I would one day call home? Could I live a whole life here, close to nature as well as humanity?"

In *A Home in the Heart of a City*, Hirsch traces her eight years of increasing engagement in Jamaica Plain's community. She writes concisely and anecdotally about people who have devoted their energy to this section of Boston, once known for its faded atmosphere, its drug-related violence, and its scars from failed planning efforts like the Southwest Corridor. Now, she reports, the people of Jamaica Plain "live in harmony and a cultural abundance that is the envy of our neighbors." The population, she notes, is about 50 percent white, 33 percent Latino and 17 percent African-American; about one-third live in households below the poverty line.

"Citizens" is the first of two main sections. The emphasis is on individuals who work hard every day to create a home in the world around them. We begin at Jamaica Pond, where Christine Cooper started fighting blight on her own. Now she leads a sustained, "community-based volunteer project" to keep the pond beautiful. After chapters focusing on other individuals—notably an advocate for Latina women and children, the director of the local Y, and a master

picture-framer—Hirsch brings us to Doyle's for a meal. At Doyle's, a popular gathering place, Hirsch gives us a taste of Jamaica Plain's diversity with a look at its bulletin boards. Along with business cards and flyers are announcements about soccer, ice skating, basketball, yoga, poetry readings, book groups and theater groups.

In the book's second part, "Community," Hirsch offers more stories, which are parables exemplifying projects—such as community gardens, festivals, and parades—that create and nourish the sense of community. In another example, members of the Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Development Corporation gradually succeed in encouraging residents to help plan scattered-site, limited-equity housing co-ops. One explanation for the extraordinary level of community activism is offered by the editor of *The Jamaica Plain Gazette*; she notes that there is "almost a symbiosis between having a paper and the degree to which a neighborhood is empowered."

But what about the prospects for Jamaica Plain's children in Boston's public schools? To Hirsch's credit, she offers suggestions for schools that set academic excellence and development of community skills as goals.

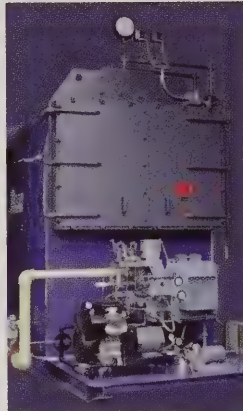
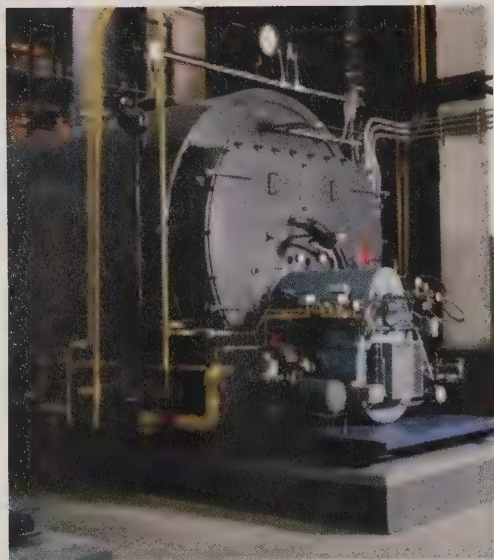
Appropriately, in the book's final pages, we revisit Jamaica Pond where families have gathered on the banks to celebrate a Lantern Festival. Hirsch makes the concept of community seem attainable if we are willing to listen to one another, to make sustained efforts, and to take time to reflect on the value of a place.

Helen F. Smith lives in Newton, MA, and teaches at Newton North High School. ■■■■



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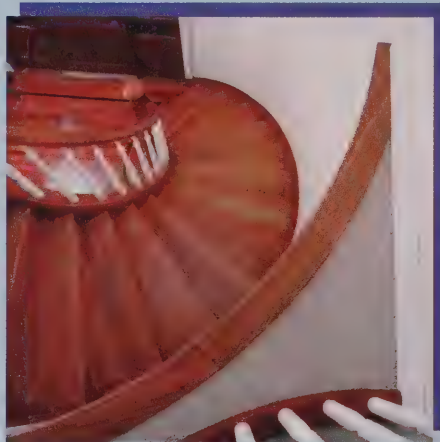
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CST is a grassroots organization that "helps people to build better communities with less traffic." Who can argue with that? If your local Borders doesn't stock the latest bestsellers on traffic calming, you can order them here.

### The Architecture of Jamaica Plain

[www.home.earthlink.net/~oshows/](http://www.home.earthlink.net/~oshows/)

A terrific guide to the buildings and architectural styles of one of Boston's great neighborhoods.

### Joint Center for Housing Studies

[www.gsd.harvard.edu/jcenter](http://www.gsd.harvard.edu/jcenter)

This collaboration of the Harvard Graduate School of Design and the Kennedy School of Government produces papers and reports analyzing the effects of demographic, economic, and social trends on housing. Look for the full-text version of the "1999 State of the Nation's Housing."

### International Dark-Sky Association

[www.darksky.org](http://www.darksky.org)

The case for turning off the lights.

### Institute for Cultural Landscape Studies

[www.icls.harvard.edu](http://www.icls.harvard.edu)

This new site devotes too much space to wondering about the definition of "cultural landscape" including, gulp, a matrix of possible definitions. But there is some provocative material here. Watch this space.

### Sprawl Resource Guide

[www.plannersweb.com/sprawl/spr~cont.html](http://www.plannersweb.com/sprawl/spr~cont.html)

A good overview of the dilemma, produced by the *Planning Commissioners Journal*, with links to resources, articles, and factoids.

### 54 Ways You Can Help the Homeless

[www.earthsystems.org/ways](http://www.earthsystems.org/ways)

An online book by Rabbi Charles Kroloff. Collect all 54!

### Urban Agriculture

[www.cityfarmer.org](http://www.cityfarmer.org)

A wonderful site produced by Canada's Office of Urban Agriculture, promoting urban food production. Terrific links. Learn why chickens might be better pets than dogs.

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Found any good Web sites addressing design issues? Send your candidates for our Winter issue to: [architectureboston@architects.org](mailto:architectureboston@architects.org)





Photo © Peter Handwerker

**Although I have never been** an enthusiastic fan of baseball (I suppose I'm considered a "fair-weather friend" of the Red Sox), I remember clearly my first opportunity to attend a game at Fenway Park. Actually, my first missed opportunity. I scowled as my father took my male, baseball-playing cousin to the game instead of me—his fussy, I-will-wear-only-dresses daughter. They disappeared through the front door, sporting matching BoSox caps, my smug cousin practicing his pathetic wind-up as my father began his own creative rendition of "Take Me Out to the Ballgame." I puttered around the house, my exterior reddened with resentment, as my interior turned as green as the fabled Monster with envy.

About five years later, a close friend and I scored two tickets each to a Red Sox game, after winning first place in a health fair. And so, one muggy July night, three friends and I clambered up a never-ending ramp, scrambling past various vendors, anxiously searching for our seats before the first pitch. A bored-looking teenager pointed the way, and we planted ourselves in our designated, decaying area, careful not to let the spilled beer and sticky soda seep into our shorts.

As the game began, I looked around the massive "park" for the first time. Green seemed to be the recurring color scheme. Bright green field. Green walls. Green bleachers. A not-so-demonic Green Monster. Even a few green faces here and there—some people apparently had a head start on the beer-and-frank consumption. I noticed a lot of dirt. I felt peanuts pelt my head, courtesy of a pack of prepubescent boys. I heard the relentless "Get yah haat daaags heah!" and was tempted, if only to silence the poor man.

The game droned on. I decided to explore the concourses, much to the agitation of the fans seated in my row. There was brick. And concession stands. And over-priced eats. More ramps. Stairs going up, and stairs going down. It was confusing. Fearing that I might be forever lost in this flashy chaos, I turned on my heels and returned to my seat.

Still the game continued. The fans might have been tireless, but I certainly wasn't. My eyes glazed over, and my head dropped a bit more after every run, every strikeout, every ball, every base secured. I had awaited this "Seventh Inning Stretch" business in eager anticipation, but I'd already had enough. Stretch or

no stretch, I wanted out. I begged my friends to leave with me, bribing them with a promise of Burger King—my treat. I still don't know what won them over—hunger or the realization that it was going to be another losing game.

As we trooped down the stairs, I surveyed the scene one last time. The stains and grime seemed to disappear under the stadium lights, and the bright green centerfield glowed in contrast with the dark shadows of the corners. Suddenly a cheer went up, filling every stale inch with its roar. Standing there, feeling the unified fans' excitement as they cheered their team on, I understood. The fans knew this dingy old diamond had long-ago lost its luster, but they loved it anyway. For them, it was a priceless heirloom, cherished by everyone in the family, including—finally—the dress-wearing daughter. ■■■

Maura McDonald is a senior at Boston Latin School.



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# ArchitectureBoston

Winter 1999

D e s i g n

**The Red Sox have served this city well** in ways that have nothing to do with sports: As our undisputed alter ego, they have provided an endless source of metaphors and commentary on Boston itself. And so it is no surprise that yet another aspect of the Bostonian personality was revealed recently at Fenway, in an announcement that the last regular-season home game of the century would be played on September 27.

How like Boston — to look backward even as we move forward. A marketing consultant from California might have urged the Red Sox to announce instead the first game of the new millennium. But even the Red Sox, despite their zeal for a new ballpark, cannot help but honor the history of that place.

And that is the quandary facing Boston's architects at the end of the 20th century. In an era marked by the rise of Modernism, in a design community now dominated by baby-boomers who once questioned authority and talked of revolution, Boston's architects are astonishingly respectful, even deferential, to their elders.

Let's admit it: Boston's architects have a reputation for conservatism. Certainly many recent buildings suggest an unnatural fixation on the past. But to suggest that this is due to some mutation in our architectural gene pool is just plain wrong. We don't have to look very far to find wonderful buildings that are both inventive and confident — some of them designed by the very architects who have produced some of our most conservative buildings.

Boston's architects and developers have been caught in an endless Alphonse/Gaston routine ("After you!" "No, no, after you!"), each deferring to the other's design sensibilities, neither exerting the leadership to break the cycle and move forward. Both have been misled by presumption — the presumed reactions of city officials, of neighborhood advocates, of Ralph-Lauren-garbed tenants.

But change is on the way. Both the Boston Redevelopment Authority and the Boston Civic Design Commission are encouraging greater design innovation. Trend-spotters predict that millennial madness will whet the public's taste for "the new." And most significantly, a new market for design has emerged, not from the private commercial sector, but from institutions such as the Museum of Fine Arts, the Fogg Museum, MIT, even the Massachusetts Convention Center Authority — all of whom propose significant, innovative structures.

Does that mean that Boston's architects will suddenly resemble butterfly collectors, flailing about trying to capture each fad as it flutters by? Probably not — after all, this *is* Boston. Let's hope that we instead see a new architecture that is fresh and energetic, but that belongs to and honors this place.

Elizabeth S. Padjen FAIA  
Editor

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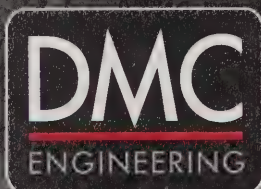
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The Massachusetts Board of Building Regulations and Standards (BBRS) has adopted **NEW ENERGY CONSERVATION REQUIREMENTS** into the State Building Code (780 CMR). The new provisions will take effect on **JANUARY 1, 2001**, and will cover all new commercial and high-rise residential construction in the state.

BBRS will be offering **FREE SEMINARS** on the new Energy Code. The following schedule is for **ENVELOPE** seminars. (Sessions on Lighting and on HVAC requirements will also be offered.) Registration is required at least one week in advance. AIA members will receive CES Learning Units through the Boston Society of Architects. Please register by e-mail at [www.state.ma.us/bbbs/register.htm](http://www.state.ma.us/bbbs/register.htm) or call 617-951-1433 x323. AM sessions run from 8:30 to 12:00, PM sessions from 1:00 to 4:30. Directions will be sent with confirmation.

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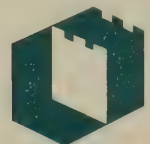
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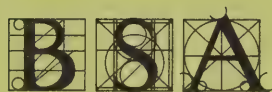
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# ArchitectureBoston

Winter 1999:  
Design  
Volume 2: Number 4



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*ArchitectureBoston*  
is published quarterly  
by the Boston Society  
of Architects/AIA.

Editorial offices:  
52 Broad Street  
Boston, MA 02109  
Tel: 617-951-1433 x221  
Fax: 617-951-0845

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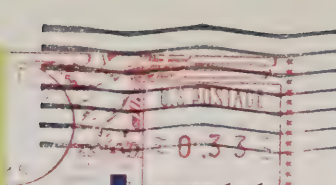
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ISSN 1099-6346

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# Letters

**HOMER RUSSELL** has done yeoman service for the BRA [Boston Redevelopment Authority] and for the community in his efforts to promote good design when all too often no one else seemed to care very much.

But I must take strong exception to his characterization [Letters, Spring 1999] of architect Paul Rudolph's Lindemann Center, "that dingy pile of concrete," as "an impenetrable, aggressive fortress — maybe one of the most unfriendly in all of Boston." I couldn't disagree more. The blame lies entirely with the Department of Mental Health, which would desperately like to get rid of the building it does not know how to use.

The program for the building was developed by Eric Lindemann as commissioner of mental health, who was far ahead of his time. It was a marked departure from the then-prevailing practice of incarcerating the mentally ill in isolated institutional buildings which were deliberately kept out of sight.

The central idea behind the Lindemann was to accept the mentally ill in a location convenient to their family and friends and see if temporary treatment could work. If it didn't, they then went to a regular institution. And when they were ready to come out, they were to be sent back to the Lindemann as a sort of half-way house, where they would become more ready to rejoin the community and get reacquainted with their family and friends. Simple as it seems, it was a brand new idea at the time.

The Lindemann Center is, if you know how to use it, a very people-friendly building. It has a good-sized gym with a good-sized basketball court and a swimming pool that I have never seen anyone use. And an absolutely wonderful layout for a primary school and a daycare center.

It also has a sublime little chapel. (Most people do not know that Paul's father was an ordained minister.) A few years ago, on a detailed tour of the building, I asked to see the chapel. It was difficult. It took three keys to open it up. Why? Because one inmate attempted to immolate himself on the altar. Bureaucratic response: Close it off. The pool and gym? Too much trouble.

Another complaint: The building had seven exits and entrances to promote interaction. Now, and for years past, all but one has been closed off. Mismanagement, I say.

Paul was very sad about that and so am I. As I am with the failure to use City Hall and its plaza creatively. Let's hope that the mayor's use of the plaza for the all-star game will set us off in a new direction.

Edward J. Logue Hon. AIA  
West Tisbury, MA



**IT'S ALWAYS INTERESTING** to compare the publicity on your city to the reality. *ArchitectureBoston* recently focused on two issues that are critical to where I live in Chelsea: waterfront development and the renaissance of rim cities [Spring, Fall 1999]. While the attention is welcome, both discussions missed the mark on some important issues which are key to the vitality of a place like Chelsea: the local impacts of a regional economy, accountability for those impacts, and the meaning of good design in a gritty, industrialized city.

The regional economy — and the disparity between who enjoys the benefits of that economy and who bears the burden — is a big issue in Chelsea. Chelsea is a sacrifice area for the regional economy and for dirty businesses that blight the city: the Tobin Bridge; Logan's operations — including a blitzkrieg of low-flying jets, air cargo, 18-wheelers, and passenger cars — and associated businesses like parking lots and car rental facilities; oil-tank farms; junk lots; tanning operations; and open-air road-salt piles.

To complicate the issue, many of those operations are public ones. Massport is a major player in Chelsea. Its influence did not stop with the construction of the Tobin Bridge. And it plans to bring more business than we can live with. Proposed Runway 14/32 would route 23,000 more jets over the city and concentrate the midnight-to-6-AM cargo jets here. With the cooperation of some city officials and the former receiver, Massport has turned the waterfront into a massive parking lot and car-rental agency. The community activists I know did not complain about developments like this, "feel good, and then go home." They fought like hell, and continue to, for remediation.

Which raises a touchy issue about development in the rim cities: What's good for business is not necessarily good for neighborhoods, especially when there is no accountability. The good times can be a nightmare for a city that cannot or will not protect its residents.

Chelsea has been able to do remarkable things — when it has the will, it finds a way. The recent Everett Avenue urban renewal initiative is an example. But many of the residents who have advocated better police protection and an end to blight have encountered resistance or even ridicule from City Hall. Many decisions that affect the residents' quality of life most directly are made without citizen or even City Council input or knowledge. We read about them in the paper.

Here's a development challenge for the city that would accomplish two of [City Manager Guy] Santagate's stated goals: open space and access to the waterfront. There's a 20-acre Logan Park 'n' Go facility on the waterfront that was built in a matter of weeks. It's part of what the city once promised the community would be a 21-acre park. The city changed its mind, but the city and developers promised to convert the remaining acre into a gateway park. That was more than two years ago. The site is a dumping ground, directly across from a sign that reads "Welcome to Chelsea." The streets of Chelsea tell their own development story.

Elaine McGrath  
Chelsea, MA

**YOUR RECENT ESSAYS** by Jack Clarke and Margaret Dyson ["Two Views," Fall 1999] draw attention to the misguided application of the state's school construction program, which has been allowed to run on automatic pilot without regard to the special circumstances of land-starved communities with buildings that can be recycled. A parallel situation occurred with federally sponsored urban-renewal programs that were indifferent to historic neighborhoods. Following public outcry, official policy was modified to accommodate increasingly valuable historical resources.

The Massachusetts School Building Assistance program does not proactively preserve existing buildings in that it defers to the members of local school committees, who do not want to deal with property maintenance and who believe in the assumed superiority of "brand-newness." This happened last spring in Marblehead, when the town voted to build a new \$43 million high school on its largest tract of undeveloped land, without fully exploring the educational consequences and logistics of utilizing an existing structure. Publicity continued to put forward the misbelief that renovation would not be reimbursable. As a result, 13 percent of town-owned forested land will be lost. Existing soccer fields will be eliminated, and their replacement may harm adjacent wetlands. A little more thought, imagination, and flexibility would have avoided this unnecessary sprawl.

The secretary of the Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, Robert Durand, wrote the following to local conservation commissions in last May:

"It would be tragic for our children's needs for schools and their needs for parks to come into continuing conflict. Whenever possible, we should encourage the reuse of existing school buildings, which are often key physical and symbolic landmarks of our communities. Too often there is an unfounded presumption that historic school buildings cannot be converted to meet modern educational needs. A number of successful recent projects, including high schools in Adams, Fairhaven, and Brookline, and the Quinsigimond Village School in Worcester, show that historic schools can be adapted with great success. If reuse is truly not possible, we should favor the construction of new schools on previously developed sites within our downtowns and town centers. This policy is consistent with Executive Order 385, which requires all state agency policies and programs to favor the reuse of existing buildings and the redevelopment of previously developed sites."

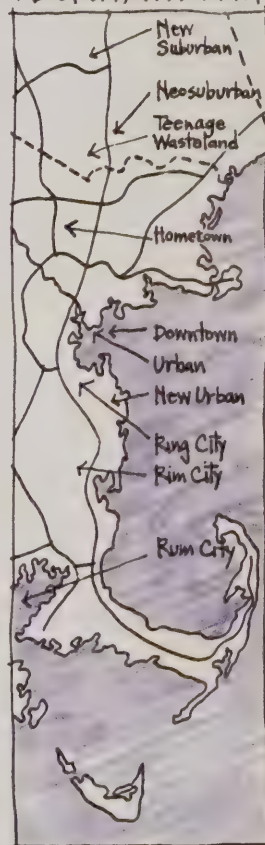
Balancing the conflicting pressures of school building with open space and historic preservation requires both that communities identify their planning goals and objectives, and that the state funding program more fully scrutinizes projects in which open space and/or historic structures are vulnerable.

Edward O. Nilsson AIA  
Former chairman, Planning Board  
Marblehead, MA

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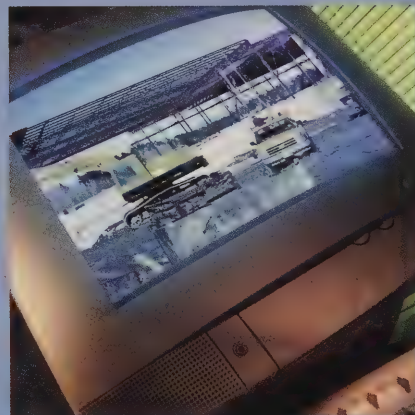
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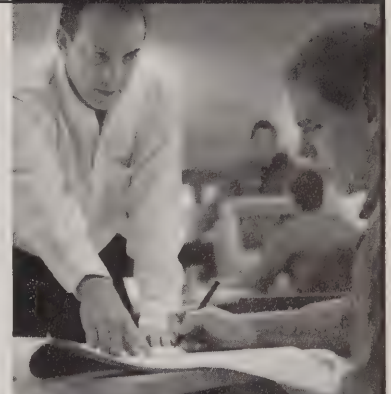
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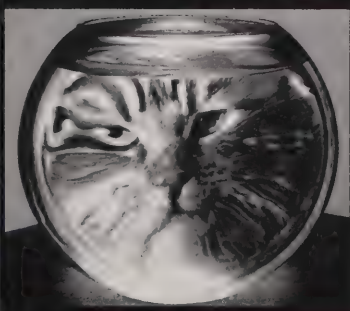
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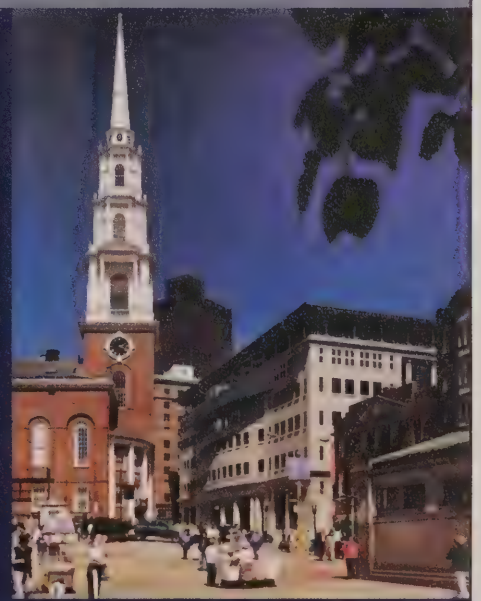
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# New Territory:

## The architecture of the seaport district

Proposals for new buildings are already sprouting in the 1,000-acre site that lies across the Fort Point Channel from downtown Boston. Still colloquially dubbed the "seaport district," despite its official rechristening as the "South Boston Waterfront," this near-vacant expanse has been the subject of countless hours and innumerable meetings devoted to planning issues. Yet surprisingly little public discussion has addressed the design of the buildings that will ultimately shape the district's character. What is an appropriate architecture for the seaport? And will it signal a new direction for Boston architects?

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**Padjen** ▶ People are talking about the future architecture of the seaport district in terms that convey a sense of excitement—which makes me wonder what they are hoping for, or why they're hoping for it in the first place. Is this really a commentary about architecture in other parts of the city?

**Goody** ▶ That's a fascinating question. I think that many of us have a respect for the quality of downtown Boston — the scale of the streets, the texture of its buildings — and feel that whatever we build new here should in some way respond to that and be sympathetic to it. But the seaport has its own ethos. The buildings there are robust and simple. Because of the character of the area — and in some areas the lack of character — I think there's an opportunity to do something bolder, maybe with larger gestures, though not necessarily a larger scale. What I find fascinating is that the seaport masterplan that many of us pressed for is one that includes fairly small-scale blocks. We're trying to replicate the pedestrian character of old Boston. But we're looking for buildings that are beefier — a bolder, gutsier architecture.

**Campbell** ▶ I worry a little about “bolder” and “gutsier”— it seems to preconceive what's appropriate. But there's no conflict between being contextual and being fresh and inventive. Those are not oppositions. Of course you want to respect the past. Of course you want to respect the character of the place. Of course you want to fit the context. That doesn't mean that the architecture can't knock your socks off. I think we are still in a backlash from the urban-renewal period and the devastating rebuilding of parts of Boston. And so architects and developers wrap everything in a kind of thick, woolly blanket of brick, because everybody thinks that's what Boston's all about. That's really absurd.

**Miklos** ▶ Everyone's enamored of the warehouse district and the Boston Wharf buildings, which evolved out of a certain response to an economic need as buildings of utility. To try to carry that tradition forward is a temptation because we love those buildings, but to carry that forward into this district today, which has very different functional requirements, is a great danger. I really believe it is possible to continue our pedestrian street quality but to have an architecture that is clearly modern and of our time. It's even been suggested that the whole district could be articulated in glass and steel.

**Healy** ▶ An entire district of glass and steel makes me just as nervous as an entire district of brick. It's just as arbitrary.

**Campbell** ▶ It's a visual argument, and I think we've got to get beyond that. If we're going to try to make something that is up-to-date, we're going to have to ask ourselves what's different about today. There's an interest in ecology, in minimizing the drain on the earth's resources. There is an interest in making the workplace far more agreeable. There's a need to re-concentrate people in settlements. There is a need for parks in cities. There are a lot of issues that make this era different, that make freshness and invention appropriate, while maintaining the human qualities of the older Boston.

**Goody** ▶ The proposal for the Fan Pier is an interesting test, because it is the block plan we all wanted. Kallmann McKinnell & Wood is working in a different area of the district, the Fidelity area, where the blocks are much too big — they were determined by the tunnel and the highways. Fidelity started by trying to replicate downtown Boston architecture in the most superficial stylistic ways with arches and other Beaux-Arts devices that perhaps seemed to them to suggest classy Boston buildings. The BRA [Boston Redevelopment Authority] and the BCDC [Boston Civic Design Commission] tried to encourage them to do something different. Michael [McKinnell] has come up with a building that makes me smile. I think the developers lean toward the traditional, some of them because of personal taste, others because they think that's what sells in Boston. It takes a design community to help lead them away from that and show them that other things could be wonderful.

**Dunham-Jones** ▶ It seems inevitable that when you talk about architecture, the discussion somehow comes down to style and image. Those are certainly important things to talk about. But I would much rather see if the discussion could be shifted toward building performance — like the German requirement that every office worker must be within 27 feet of a window. The impact that has had on building design is absolutely phenomenal. If one were to challenge designers with some kind of performance-oriented criteria promoting “green” building, for example, we would see far more creativity and far more bold, new moves.

**McKinnell** ▶ But issues such as ecological responsibility, decent working conditions, views, and light have nothing specifically to do with this particular part of Boston. They have something to do with every building that one should be building these days. So I don't see that a particular architecture for this part of Boston will grow

**“We're trying to replicate the pedestrian character of old Boston. But we're looking for buildings that are beefier — a bolder, gutsier architecture.”**

Joan Goody FAIA



"One possibility might be to start looking at a kind of Modernist expression of materials and, at the same time, somehow incorporate a smaller scale, even a sort of delicacy."

Jonathan Hale

out of those concerns. I'm not quite sure what we're talking about here. Are we talking about what will make a new architecture? Or are we talking about what would be appropriate for this particular part of Boston and its development? If I look at the plan for this district, I see a scale or grain which is the antithesis, in planning terms, of robustness or large scale. So if we treasure the robustness and large scale of this area, why are we putting these dinky little blocks there, which are smaller than many of the blocks that are already there?

**Goody**► Dinky little blocks are the best we've come up with in history. The large-scale blocks of places like Kendall Square [in Cambridge] have been the most hostile to pedestrian life.

**McKinnell**► I can think of moments in history when there was the possibility of a large-scale new gesture — when Regents Canal was built in London, for example. John Nash worked on 500-foot-long blocks, all painted white.

**Hale**► You can have gutsy buildings on small blocks. But this is not going to be like any other part of Boston. It's going to be more like New York, like the Upper West Side. It's an imitation of the New York 1916 zoning plan, with its set-back towers and 150-foot height limits.

**Padjen**► Then how can we create a new district that still feels like Boston? Ellen and Joan touched on the issue of style. Style is ultimately a big part of this conversation — it's what a lot of people have in mind when they talk about a "fresh, new architecture." I hear people talking about a maritime character, about an industrial context. What does that mean? We are working now in the midst of a Modernist revival, and you can easily imagine an overlay of an industrial style onto that, which would result in a lot of proto-Modern buildings — which to us in Boston would feel like something new.

**McKinnell**► You have to distinguish between style and fashion. Style is not a pejorative term. Many years ago, there was a marvelous article in the *Architectural Review* called "Nautical Style," written by a painter named John Piper. He analyzed, with a painter's eye, what constituted the style he observed as he looked at buildings and artifacts that were close to the waterfront. And he was able to abstract certain characteristics that were common to waterfront buildings and assemblages. One of them was "violent contrast." There is always at the waterfront a violent contrast — and it is violent —

between the massiveness of the structures that are built to accommodate people and the linear, taut elements that serve the ships. There's the violent contrast between the massiveness of the walls of buildings that were built traditionally on the waterfront and the shell-like quality of the boats that they serve. There's an incredible contrast between the Henry Moore-like bollards and the lines which are tied around them. It's very, very powerful. And I think a greater sense of visual violence would be a characteristic I would like to see in this part of Boston.

**Campbell**► I really agree with that. I think it's typical, as you go up and down the coast, that the order of a town as it approaches the water begins to break down and fragment, because it's interacting with a whole different set of forces. Maybe there are things that are not contingent on function and not contingent on a particular city, but are basic to the idea of approaching the water.

**Goody**► Those violent contrasts were more evident in the past. Today the industrial port has been pushed aside, and we're now tourists meeting the sea. What we really want is the feeling of an 18th- or 19th-century port, and we've got a failed 20th-century port, which is going to be God-knows-what in the 21st century. And, in a sense, our vision is romantic.

**Hale**► But why not welcome the idea that it's romantic? There's a limit to how much I want to walk through places that feel like industrial landscapes. A little of that goes a very long way for a pedestrian. Instead, one possibility might be to start looking at a kind of Modernist expression of materials and, at the same time, somehow incorporate a smaller scale, even a sort of delicacy. That might combine an industrial vigor with a sense of scale, playfulness, surprise.

**Dunham-Jones**► My biggest fear is that this district is going to be much too uniform. It's going to be another Kendall Square — completely boring. It's going to be out of scale and there will be too many design controls trying to simulate somebody's idea of Seaport-Meets-Kendall-Square.

**Campbell**► You're absolutely right. The Pritzkers are building the first six blocks of the Fan Pier all at once, because the city refuses to build the streets. So the streets are being built privately. As is the below-grade parking. That's an enormous front-end investment. And the only way they can make that work, they say — and I see no reason not to believe



them — is to build it all at once and get those rents pouring in from day one. I wish this were developing incrementally. But economically, it's not going to happen.

**Dunham-Jones** ▶ And because it's not happening incrementally, we can't recreate the effect of small-scale development and multiple individuals making a series of decisions over time. We'll lose the authenticity that usually comes from that process. So the challenge is to find strategies that will allow for some really vital differences, the violent contrasts that Michael was talking about.

**Healy** ▶ I think everyone's talking about the sexy part of the district — the Fan Pier and right along the waterfront. But behind that is a wasteland that connects with South Boston and a nicely scaled residential area. Maybe we could work from the interior back out to the water. That might provide the vitality we're looking for.

**Goody** ▶ The South Boston community would much rather see small-scale, contiguous residential development, which makes sense for them. The housing along the waterfront will probably be expensive condominiums, and the people who live there will probably only be there part-time, and so they won't contribute the liveliness that you get from middle-class people who are there all the time, out shopping and grazing along the Harbor Walk.

**Healy** ▶ The question is how to make a vital, real neighborhood instead of a commercial-cultural-retail district. You have to have real housing — not somebody's crash pad in the city. Most people, even a couple of working professionals, won't be able to touch those condos. My firm is in the process of converting a building in the North End into 28 lofts. The purchase price on a square-foot basis is so high that you have to limit the size of most units to between 900 and 1300 square feet in order to keep the cost within reach of even upscale buyers.

**Dunham-Jones** ▶ Architects often tend to either demonize the developers or shift blame over to the developers. A lot of developers try to do the good thing, and they in turn shift the blame to the regulations, the policies, and the city. Do we have to assume that the seaport will be market-driven? Who's providing the vision? Barcelona is a recent example of successful waterfront redevelopment. Good design there was driven by architects and the city, not developers.

PROPOSED "PUBLIC REALM" PLAN, FAN PIER

rendering courtesy of Spaulding & Slye Collars



**"We can't recreate the effect of small-scale development and multiple individuals making a series of decisions over time... The challenge is to find strategies that will allow for some vital differences."**

Ellen Dunham-Jones

**Padjen** ▶ Is Boston's architectural community too passive?

**McKinnell** ▶ I think about the contribution that the architectural community could make here. It would be a memorable and visionary and absolutely compelling view from Boston. That doesn't exist at all at this time. And I can absolutely predict that were I or anybody else to produce such a visionary plan, it would be completely nixed by all the people who want something rather homey and comfortable and picturesque. I think that's the real missed opportunity here. I don't agree with Brian. I think the only important thing about this area as far as architecture is concerned — where architects could really make a contribution — is precisely the waterfront. The really important thing here is to produce a fantastic vision for the waterfront and let the rest follow — and the rest would follow if it was fantastic.

**Campbell** ▶ I disagree completely. It doesn't matter what it looks like from Boston. What matters is what it's like when you're there. Back Bay doesn't look like anything from Cambridge.



"The really important thing here is to produce a fantastic vision for the waterfront and let the rest follow."

Michael McKinnell

**McKinnell** ► If it looks great from Boston, you'll want to go there.

**Campbell** ► But I don't see at all why there should be a vision for the waterfront. I don't think most of the great neighborhoods can be characterized as visions. Neighborhoods work best when they argue with each other, when they have their own character.

**Miklos** ► Ultimately it all comes down to the individual commissions and the individual architects. We've seen many variations on this plan. But in the final analysis, the character of the streets and the urban design quality of the district will come with the individual design of specific buildings.

**Healy** ► That quality doesn't come exclusively from individual decisions made by developers and their architects; the government makes some decisions as well. The selection of the Northern Avenue Bridge proposal is an example — a disaster, in my opinion. It could have been a wonderful gathering point around Fort Point Channel — that area is very lively and it's an integral part of the fabric. We could have had a collection of bridges as artifacts from a time when they really had a function instead of building new, symbolic gestures to a time past. I don't mind romance, but I think to design buildings in an industrial fashion now is a little bizarre.

**Campbell** ► I agree with that; I think it's theater.

**Padjen** ► I wonder how much we're influenced by words — names like "Seaport District" or "Waterfront District." I think they contribute to a certain amount of artifice, of theater. We've allowed this whole chunk of 1,000 acres to be influenced by that long, thin edge on the water. But in the rest of the city, we tend to think of relatively small pieces of land as discrete neighborhoods. Maybe the notion that we should somehow respond to a maritime tradition ultimately leads to an artificial crust over this whole district.

**Hale** ► I think there's a lot of room for theater in the city. When I'm walking down Newbury Street, I'm on stage and I know it. Of course, you don't want to feel that the set could be struck tomorrow. But there is a good kind of theater — and an inevitable kind of theater — in the city.

**Dunham-Jones** ► Theater often goes hand-in-hand with nostalgia. And whenever there is a technological shift, there tends to be nostalgia. There's a long history of this — cars are still talked about in horsepower and electric light in footcandles. I think there is going to be a lot of interest in the industrial aesthetic as our lives become increasingly digitally wired and simulated. What is tangibly industrial will take on a romantic, nostalgic appeal. That's very real and very understandable.

**Campbell** ► It's not romantic or nostalgic. I don't agree with those words. Materiality is just as much a part of our lives today — and tomorrow — as it was yesterday. It may become more desirable, but not for nostalgic reasons.

**Dunham-Jones** ► I think a lot of people look back at industrial buildings with a certain nostalgia: "Look at these great steel spans, look how we used to build!" But those structures can be reinterpreted in ways that are not nostalgic. Norman Foster, for example, who is doing an addition to the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, is an example of an architect who is inspired by older industrial buildings, but carries technological expression forward in a manner that is in no way nostalgic.

**Miklos** ► What we don't want is the idea of romanticizing the Boston Wharf buildings and somehow projecting their image to these new 150-foot-height-limit buildings.

**Goody** ► We're meandering around the edges of a discussion about style. Style has to grow out of the plan in many ways; you can't disassociate it from planning.

**Healy** ► Or from construction. We talk about the radical changes in the world, but we still build with mud and sticks, and we still have to deal with gravity.

**Dunham-Jones** ► That's why I don't think it's such a leap to suggest that Boston could establish performance criteria — about embodied energy, for example — as part of the approval process. Renzo Piano does an energy analysis when he does a brick building. He actually figures out exactly what's going into those bricks and comes up with a new kind of brick. That challenges creativity so much more than looking at different brick patterns in different neighborhoods. That would be a truly fresh vision for Boston — to say we're going to build the most desirable office space in this country,



because it's also going to be the most habitable and the most progressive in terms of a real respect for the environment.

**Miklos** ► But couldn't the individual architects be the protagonists for that? One aspect of the economics of this district is that these buildings are going to be very expensive on a per-square-foot basis. And that may create the opportunity for more experimentation or innovation in construction and building performance.

**McKinnell** ► I think it's quite the reverse. The buildings are going to be so expensive to build that each building will be reduced to the minimum necessary in order to be able to keep the heat and the cold out.

**Goody** ► It is hard to believe that developers would give architects more money or more leeway unless there's a commercial benefit or a governmental incentive.

**Miklos** ► So you think that can only happen if it's legislated.

**Goody** ► In the '80s, we had aesthetic competition, because presumably you could get a few dollars more rent per square foot if your building had a fancy top or a glamorous lobby. Developers were willing to spend that money, which was peanuts compared to the overall construction. But I think the only way you're going to get the innovation that Ellen is talking about is if you have a government that is self-confident enough to lay down strong and progressive rules.

**Healy** ► But there is still a role in all this for architects. How the pieces of a building go together is still our responsibility. How we put materials together is still a criterion for evaluating a building. Bricks aren't inherently bad and steel isn't inherently good. It's how they're used. Maybe I've been in Boston too long, but is something the matter with brick? I remember feeling that you couldn't do a brick building and be progressive, but now I'd love to see more progressive architects embrace the idea of doing good brick buildings.

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Brian Healy



**"It's a frightening prospect to think that [these buildings] might all be designed as a bold gesture — the city needs some fabric. Buildings can be great architecture and still be subtle and deferential to their neighbors."**

Robert Miklos

**Campbell** ▶ Michael earlier made a distinction between style and fashion, which I agree with. But I will also say that maybe there's nothing so wrong with fashion. One of the reasons that everybody's so excited about the new Guggenheim in Bilbao is that it is a new fashion made possible by a new technology, namely the computer, both in design and in construction. You ought to be able to go out into the world and read the past. You ought to be able to walk through Beacon Hill and say, "That's Federal, it must be 1810" and "That's Greek Revival, it must be 1830." Those were just fashions. They were related to the desire for novelty, and they created a world that has a timeline and therefore a legible history. I'm not opposed to that. I think we will see changes in fashion among those who will determine the architecture of this place, and I think that's perfectly OK.

**Dunham-Jones** ▶ But we're faced with the prospect of having much of this district developed in the same 15-year period.

**Padjen** ▶ Imagine if this had happened 10, 15 years ago — it would have all been Post-Modern.

**Campbell** ▶ Maybe the Fan Pier will look too all-of-a-piece, but the whole area won't develop any faster than the Back Bay, surely.

**Padjen** ▶ But it seems that the significant buildings that will really influence the rest of the district are probably going to be done reasonably quickly — barring upheaval in economic cycles. I wonder what will be the character of the buildings that some future Landmarks Commission will designate as Category 3 and 4 — the so-called background buildings. I'm very fond of Category 3 and 4 buildings — they're the workhorses that establish

how you feel about a whole neighborhood or district or city. But right now, everyone is thinking in terms of the bold gesture — there are going to be lots of architects strutting their stuff.

**Miklos** ▶ To me, it's a frightening prospect to think that they all might be designed as a bold gesture — the city needs some fabric. Buildings can be great architecture and still be subtle and deferential to their neighbors.

**Hale** ▶ You need to have some gesture, but we can't get that from buildings that seem to vanish instead of coming alive. We see it in some of the best of the wharf buildings. You certainly see it in the warehouses in Tribeca, where there might be a wonderful arch at an entrance, or terracotta decoration, or interesting brick patterns. You *can* give personality to ordinary buildings.

**Healy** ▶ We could probably walk around the warehouse district here and decide almost unanimously which are good buildings and which are not. There are some wonderful, handsome buildings, and there are also some dogs. But the dogs are OK in that context.

**Hale** ▶ This may be a time when architects can design in more than one style, when different firms can design in different styles across the street from each other. It might actually work out — it might not be a ridiculous jumble. There's a risk, and there are going to be some dogs. But it would still be better than pervasive blandness.





**Goody** ▶ The Boston Civic Design Commission has been urging designers to show us their best. They shouldn't feel constrained. But so many people assume, particularly in downtown Boston, that the powers-that-be want something which is an imitation of or a slight update on some traditional concept of Boston. What seems exciting here is that there are fewer constraints. There's been a timidity up to this point. I don't blame developers in general, but I think there is a mindset: Oh, it's Boston — if I want to get through the reviews, I'd better have something that looks traditional. And it's not true.

**Padjen** ▶ Is context a crutch for Boston architects?

**Goody** ▶ I hope not. I think it's been helpful — but it can lead to an easy way out, an apparently quick way of gaining approval. There are citizen groups who are still more comfortable with traditional, contextual work because, as Bob said, they're still reeling from the '60s.

**Miklos** ▶ The advantage of practicing in Boston is that it is a great city, and it has a great building fabric, and it actually has a lot of architectural variety. It makes us all very sensitive to urban issues and planning. I would say that's our strength. But I absolutely believe that you can do good urban planning and make good contemporary buildings.

**Dunham-Jones** ▶ That's such an important point, and we don't see it demonstrated much in this country. But if you go to Holland, you can see examples of terrific pedestrian neighborhoods made up of Bauhaus Modern buildings. Here we tend to think you can't bring the modern into contact with the historic. There's a fear or a suspicion about Modernism's ability to contribute to good urbanism.

**Healy** ▶ When I first came to Boston, I was very frustrated about the lack of a Modern language. It's the paradox of young architects coming out of school — they come here at a point in their careers when they want to shower their new vision onto a city. But they're attracted to Boston by the strength of what's already here. I totally believe the Modern language can coexist with the fabric of Boston and that it's important to allow that. But this is still Boston, and it's just as important for us to realize why we're here, especially for those who came from outside this area. There was something about Boston that attracted us, as opposed to Phoenix or Miami or LA or anyplace else. Here, context is a fact. We have to concede that Boston is a powerful place, and it is shaping what we're doing as much as we're trying to push back against it.

**Campbell** ▶ That's exactly what we would like to see in the district, that pushing of your energy against the context of the city. I'd like to see that tension, to see that argument going on in the architecture.

**Miklos** ▶ It could happen. This is a different moment in Boston's architectural history. I think, for example, that we can expect something very interesting from Rafael Viñoly for the convention center.

**Campbell** ▶ And the Fogg Museum hopes to have Renzo Piano design a new building on the Charles River. Ellen mentioned Foster at the Museum of Fine Arts. I think it *is* a new moment. I think there is a sense that for the first time in many years, Boston is open to change. Maybe it's because the economy is doing so well, or because so many young people have moved into town.

**Dunham-Jones** ▶ MIT is planning buildings by Frank Gehry, Steven Holl, and Fumihiko Maki. They're very interesting buildings, done by very interesting architects — no question about it. But these are not buildings that are of this place. They're signature pieces. The real challenge to Boston architects is to be inspired by these new explorations, but also be engaged with this place.

**Campbell** ▶ The local culture of architects is very important. San Francisco in the first decade or so of this century was a wonderful example of that. But there is a role for the "stars." H.H. Richardson is an example. He seeded a lot of cities — Pittsburgh, Chicago — and energized the architects in those cities.

**McKinnell** ▶ Of course these stars are doing precisely what they've been hired to do, which is to provide a fashionable image in that one gesture. Whether one can build an entire university campus or city with such gestures is doubtful.

**Dunham-Jones** ▶ I agree completely. When Kenneth Frampton wrote about critical regionalism, he talked about the development of local schools of architecture. Not in the literal sense of an educational institution, but in terms of a synergy among the architects in a region. An architecture could evolve that would still be progressive, but that would also be based in a very local way of building. I'd love to see Boston build on its traditions — the industrial heritage, the brick, and the sea. Let's build a school. ■■■

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Robert Campbell





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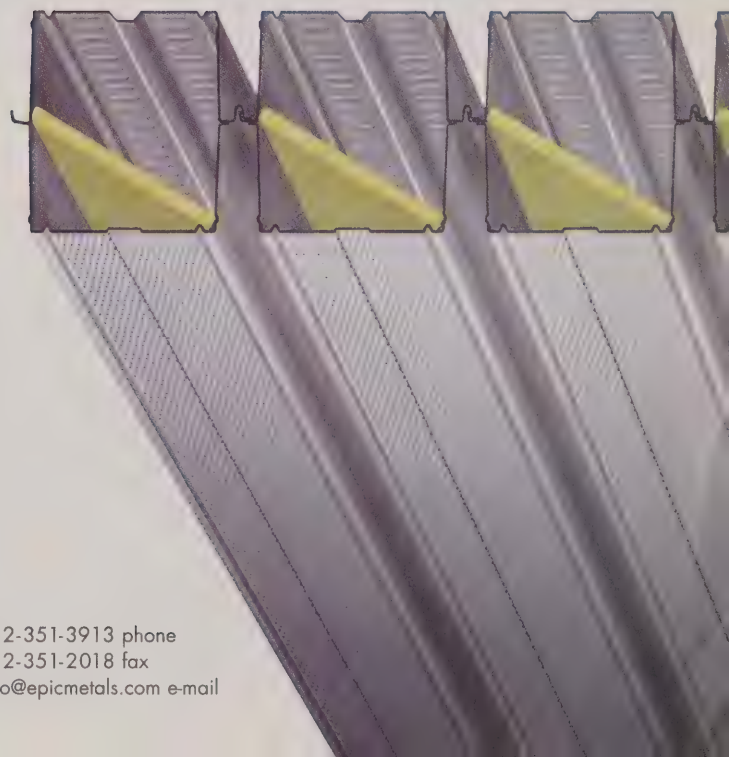
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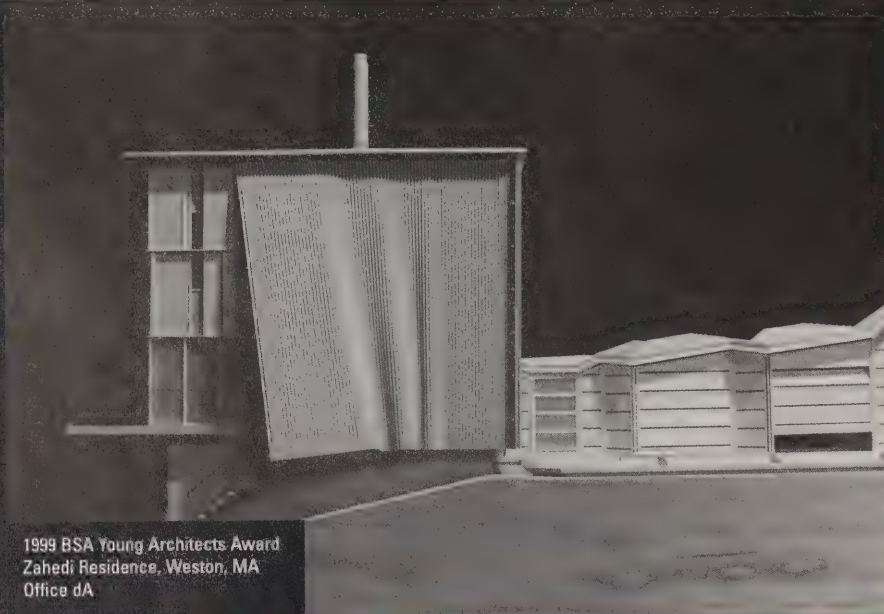
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1999 BSA Design Award  
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Abasto de Buenos Aires  
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1999 BSA/AIA-NY Sustainable  
Design Honor Award  
Maine Audubon Environmental  
Education Center, Falmouth, ME  
Van Dam & Renner/  
Carol A. Wilson Architects

**Q: Why so many awards?**



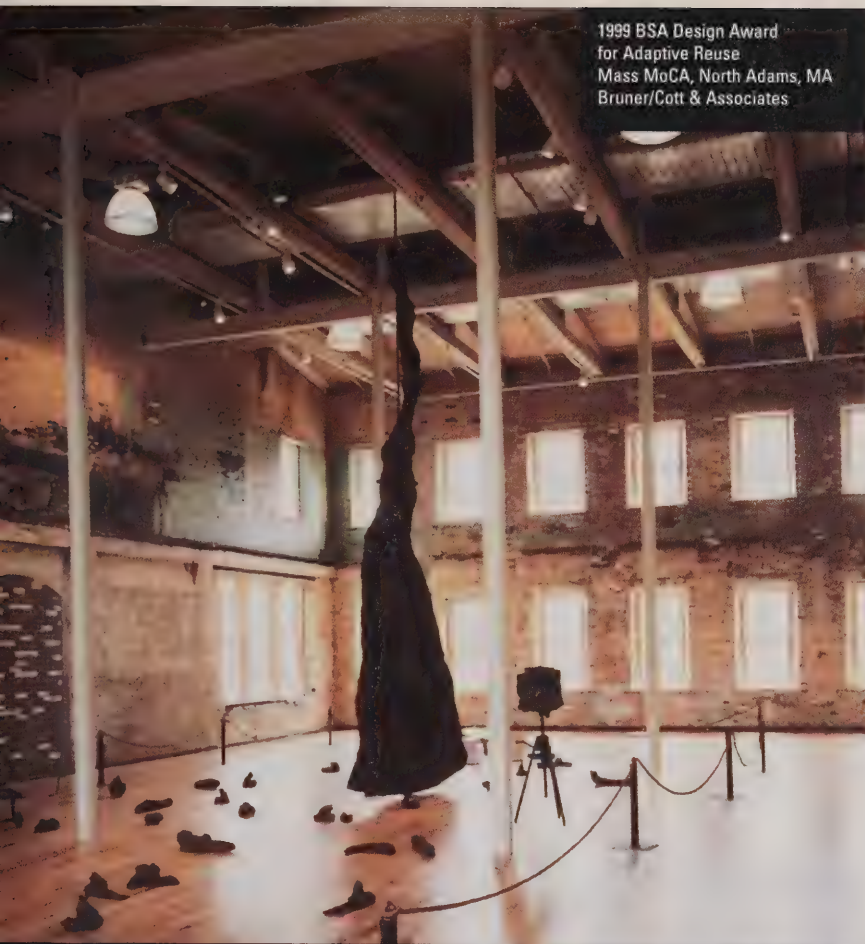
1999 BSA/AIA-NY  
Urban Design Award  
Brancusi Sculptural Complex  
Development and Restoration Plan  
Tirgu Jiu, Romania  
Christidis Lauster Radu, Architects



1999 BSA Design Award  
Sauna Bath, Tyringham, MA  
Artifact Design + Construction



1999 BSA Design Award  
for Adaptive Reuse  
Mass MoCA, North Adams, MA  
Bruner/Cott & Associates



## A: We need them.

by Robert A. Brown AIA, IIDA

**Welcome to the 71st Annual Academy Awards...the Country Music Awards...the People's Choice Awards...the Best of Boston Awards...  
The Clio Awards...The J.D. Power Awards!**

We seem obsessed with anointing the heroes and stars of our country, giving each one the allotted 15 minutes of fame before moving on to the next as fast as we can switch from one TV station to another. But ritualizing our dreams and lionizing our heroes is a fundamental aspect of the American psyche. In our eclectic and diverse society, we share the desire to congratulate all our efforts — not just the most important overall achievement, like the best picture, but each aspect of the endeavor: best writer, editor, sound technician, camera lens developer. By acknowledging each contribution, we are affirming that most American of all beliefs — that we are a classless society. Everyone is important.

The architectural community has followed suit in embracing the awards phenomenon. Locally, the Boston Society of Architects sponsors eight awards programs and eight scholarships or fellowships recognizing excellence in our profession. Urban design, interior design, healthcare facilities, sustainable design, and housing design represent only a few of the categories into which architecture is now sliced, and we duly honor each of them with our equivalent of best screenplay and best documentary.

These awards programs recognize that good architecture today is more than just a beautiful building. Our work, reflecting our society, has become increasingly complex, as design professionals respond more comprehensively to social, technical, and environmental factors in addition to the basic requirement of shelter. By looking beyond form and function, awards programs can serve as vehicles to improve our work. We can encourage greater rigor in less glamorous building types such as industrial, correctional, and utility projects, to name a few. We can gain a better understanding of technically complex buildings such as medical facilities, transportation structures, and research buildings. We can focus attention on projects often overlooked by the design community, such as low-income housing, public facilities, and suburban retail developments. And perhaps most significantly, awards programs can introduce the public to the full impact of architecture — how it affects our lives in many ways beyond pure physical presence.

But not everyone is pleased with the increased fanfare. Many architects criticize the proliferation of awards programs, arguing that the sheer numbers devalue their significance: If everyone is important, then no one is important. The critics worry that specialized awards may tend to marginalize the work that is supposedly being honored. They fear that expanded awards programs will appear self-promoting or excessively self-congratulatory, and that there is a danger of creating a bureaucracy that bestows awards simply to meet a public relations quota.

The response to the skeptics rests with the awards jury, which has the responsibility to determine design excellence. But certain objectives can be reinforced in order to strengthen the jury process. Clear and rigorous criteria for entrants and juries must be established and followed consistently from year to year. Each jury should consist of recognized experts in their fields. Juries must maintain the highest standards and honor only the most commendable projects — and have the confidence and



## Why so many awards?

support to bypass submissions that do not meet these rigorous criteria. Finally, there must be a way for juries to actually experience the architecture they are judging; photographic images can suggest design skill but cannot convey the environmental impact of the architecture, or its success or failure with regard to its site, community, and users.

Determining the best architectural endeavor, unlike the Academy Awards, should not be a democratic electoral process. It is important to preserve and enhance the jury system, which can look beyond a popular or politically appropriate choice and delve with an expert understanding into the complex nature of each submission and its significance to the profession at large.

Awards programs serve a purpose beyond recognizing design excellence or adding to the applause already given to the elevated few. These programs have educational value and can enhance the discussion of our profession by demystifying the award selection process itself and making architecture more understandable to all users. We must continue to expand our outreach to a broader constituency — broader even than our clients and our consultants. We should assume the responsibility for educating our neighbors about the complexities of the building process. A more educated and informed community will work toward a better built environment.

An expanded awards program embracing strict selection criteria and high design standards can expose excellent architectural efforts in surprising places. Good architecture consists of more than good buildings — it responds to the breadth of human emotions and needs, engaging the broadest constituencies in its creation. Recognition of these efforts assists us all in raising the quality of our profession — resulting in a better-designed and richer physical environment. **BBB**

Robert A. Brown AIA, IIDA, is a principal of CBT/Childs Bertman Tseckares Inc. in Boston. Co-chair of the BSA Design Committee, he serves on the BSA board as commissioner of honors and awards.



photos: Peter Vanderwarker





1999 BSA Honor Award  
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1999 BSA Honor Award  
Holocaust Memorial  
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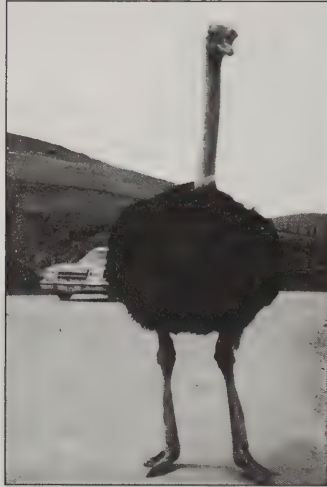
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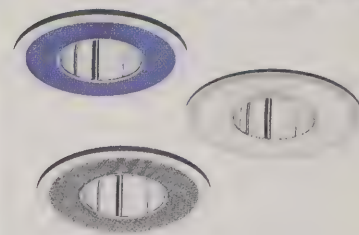
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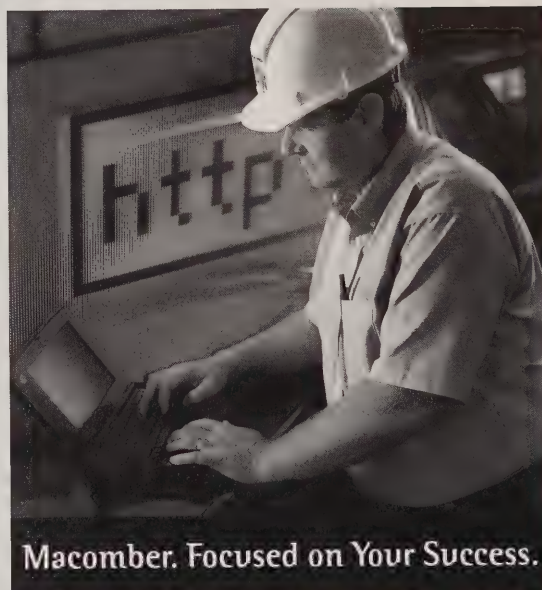
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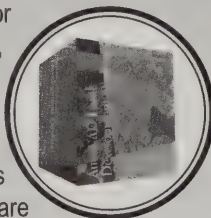
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# The Alternative House

by Jeremiah Eck FAIA

**When I was a child**, one of my joys was to explore partially constructed houses. Sneaking across a plank between firm ground and the new foundation, I would imagine the rooms yet to be fully realized and wonder at this new object in the neighborhood.

Back then, the relatively few houses that were built were generally constructed on lots in, or very near, the center of town by small contractors whom we all knew. I would pour over the drawings but seldom saw the name of an architect.

Suburban houses:  
can we do better?

Such market-driven houses, built with simple drawings, have always been around in one form or another. Like the houses in my neighborhood, they were most often a part of a gradually evolving environment that seemed under control. How times have changed! In the last 30 years the scope and scale of their construction have dramatically altered our landscapes, and the chasm between these market-driven — so-called “builder” or “production” — houses and the custom, architect-designed house is now vast and staggering. The question I keep asking myself is: “Why aren’t architects more involved in production houses?” and the corollary question: “Why aren’t owners, builders, or developers asking architects to be involved?”

Each year more than a million single-family homes are built in this country. Last year the number was even closer to a million-and-a-half. According to the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB), there are approximately 77 million existing single-family homes. Astonishingly, given the rate of construction, almost one-third of the entire American single-family home stock has been built in the last 25 years. At the same time, the demographics of home ownership are also changing. Nearly 50 percent of American households are couples with no children: older people whose kids have moved out; people who never had kids; or people who are younger and have decided to delay having kids. Equally interesting is the fact that 25 percent of American households are people living alone. Even as our definition of “family” is changing, we continue to build more and bigger houses than ever, with little difference in their designs.

It comes as no surprise to architects that only a very small percentage of those houses are the product of the design process that they were trained for: houses that are responsive to the site and environment, of good design and high-quality construction, and unique to their owners. The issue of sprawl, now on all our minds, is as much about these houses as it is about planning. The fact is they are being built, and you don’t really need full architectural services to build them.

The architect/planner Andres Duany defines four potential architect/owner relationships: patron, client, consumer, and victim. I find these categories useful, as I suspect one of the reasons architects aren’t involved in designing more single-family houses is that they tend to think of themselves as providing services to either patrons or clients.





To think of their clients as consumers runs completely counter to their sense of professional and, perhaps, ethical standards. There are other reasons, too. Designing a truly “custom” house is not easy. It is often subject to the whims of owners, mothers-in-law, builders — the list could go on. A good house also takes time. Why spend a year or longer with an architect in design and construction when you can find most of what you want “off-the-shelf” through a builder right now or in a few months? And who needs an architect to design a house anyway? Since we all live in houses, we all must know how to design them. Right?

And then there is the money. Why pay 10 percent to 15 percent — sometimes even more — of the cost of construction to an architect? The builder or developer throws in the design essentially for free, and will even customize the kitchen cabinets. (The people who make this argument are the same people, of course, who will pay the broker who sold them the land or house a 6 percent fee for a few hours of work.) I’m being facetious, but you get the point. The truth is that bankers, brokers, builders, and borrowers don’t see the value in working with architects on most single-family homes, and most architects don’t know how to provide the services they need.

So how do we get the two sides together? One could easily say the solution is too complicated — wrapped up, as the single-family home is, in economics and taste. But I’d like to suggest a few possibilities.

First, we need more early art education, not just for architects but for all of us. Last time I looked, there were still two statues in front of the Boston public library, one representing art and the other science. When you produce art, you construct an object with admirable shape, proportion, color. That’s a right-brain experience. Once you’ve known it, you’ll appreciate the process of making beautiful objects (yes, I used the word “beautiful”), and you’ll appreciate better houses. Without such an education, you will come to rely on advertising slogans and images to make up your vision of a house — one-liners like “curb appeal.” At upper levels of education, it’s time for students of architecture to study the single-family house again. I was encouraged to hear that three such studios were recently offered at the Harvard Graduate School of Design. This has not been the case for many years.

It’s also time for practicing architects to offer various kinds of residential architectural services with a variety of fee structures, not just for clients who want a custom, one-of-a-kind house, but also for clients who will be satisfied with a more generic house — the “consumer” clients. This is not a new idea in the Boston area. Some of the early houses of Carl Koch, Hugh Stubbins, and Royal Barry Wills are models of good design easily adapted to a range of client needs. Architects are professionals trained to examine changing demographics and to respond with an appropriate physical design. Often people don’t know what they want until they see an interesting alternative; the introduction of foreign automobiles into the American market is one good example. I’ve even sold a few plans of houses, designed for individual clients, that had more universal appeal. I struggled with that issue for years but came to the conclusion that the quality of most stock plans is so low that any contribution I could make to the single-family house market was better than sitting on the sidelines.

Architects also have not emphasized their talent at controlling the quality/cost equation. As unresponsive design and poor construction in the suburbs are becoming more evident, value — both in good design and good construction — is of increasing concern to consumers. I renovate a lot of older, well-designed houses. But can anyone really imagine renovating today’s disposable houses 20 or 30 years from now?

Finally, it is time for all of us — planners, architects, owners, builders, bankers, and brokers — to reconsider our relationships, recognizing that we all have talents that can be brought to the mix. My dream house may not be yours, but quality is recognizable in many forms. Like all good investments, this approach will require sensible reflection by all of us and, of course, time. An alternative house — better sited, designed, and constructed — could be the result. Our environment and our health depend on it.

Jeremiah Eck FAIA is a principal of Jeremiah Eck Architects, Inc. in Boston, specializing in residential and academic work. He is a former lecturer in architecture at the Harvard Graduate School of Design.



photographs courtesy Jeremiah Eck Architects



# School Treasures

## Architectural gems in Boston's public schools

By Doris Cole FAIA  
Photographs by Nick Wheeler

**Richard Mather  
Elementary School  
Dorchester, 1905**  
Parapet detail

The top of the building is crowned with a finely carved American eagle; below are the delicate stone tracery windows of the auditorium.

**William E. Russel  
Elementary School  
Dorchester, 1903**  
Front façade



photos © Nick Wheeler



**At a time** when lamenting the decline of educational standards in our schools is fashionable, if not obligatory, lessons can be learned from the past. There are many similarities between the turning of the last century and this century that color our vision for the future and how we are preparing our schools to fulfill that vision. Economic volatility, civic instability, population growth, technological advances, and the disparity between national ideals and realities are among those factors that affected the turning of the last century and will affect the path into the 21st century.

In the early 1900s, public education became more than teaching the three R's — reading, writing, and arithmetic — in Boston and America. As social historians have noted, educators and concerned citizens looked to the school to alleviate and mitigate the detrimental influences of industrialization and urbanization; inundation by millions of immigrants; the declining influence of the church upon the home; relaxation of parental discipline; and the living conditions of crowded slums. Schools were to instill in children the moral guidelines for overcoming life's hardships as well as the mental training for productive occupations.



Solidly placed on Columbia Road, this expansive façade is scaled to the broad avenue.

The red brick exterior is highlighted with limestone; behind the half-round windows is an assembly hall.

**Thomas A. Edison  
Middle School  
Brighton, 1932**  
Door detail

This aluminum door grille combines several principles of the '30s Modern Movement: use of manufactured materials, naturalistic design elements, and functional forms.



The schoolhouse design standards developed in Boston reflected the educational system and philosophy at the turn of the century. For example, the reading-writing-arithmetic curriculum had been expanded to include history, geography, physiology, nature study, drawing, manual training, home economics, and various other subjects. The plans for Boston grammar schools included sewing rooms, cooking rooms, and manual training shops for children in grades one through eight. By 1906, the Boston Schoolhouse Department had issued high-school standards for chemistry, physical, botanical, and zoological laboratories.

Technological advances in the early 1900s dominated employment opportunities just as they do in the late 1900s. One hundred years ago, expanding industrialization needed literate and skilled workers in factories. Today, expanding computerization needs literate and skilled workers in offices. Schools are once again stretching beyond the 3 R's and beyond laboratory science, industrial arts, and home economics to contemporary technology for teaching, learning, and communicating.

Though the classical revival style was selected for the Boston public schools in the first years of this century, the materials and systems were decidedly contemporary. Sturdy, durable materials were selected that would stand up to hard use by thousands of school children. Central heating for the cold New England winters was provided by large coal-burning boilers in the basements and cast-iron steam radiators in each classroom. State-of-the-art engineering systems included gravity-air ventilation ducts running up vertically through the building to the roof. Glazed-brick walls and terrazzo floors were in the corridors;



## School Treasures

**Martin Luther King, Jr.  
Middle School**  
Dorchester, 1937  
Lobby detail

This lobby is the community entrance to the auditorium. The walls are covered with Vitrolite panels, a then-new material resembling black glass. The floor and wall base are marble.

**Roger Clapp  
Elementary School**  
Dorchester, 1896  
Fence detail

Wrought-iron fences were typical of many school yards after the 1890s. Here, some of the original scroll decorations are missing and a bar has been added along the top as a safety measure.



photos: © Nick Wheeler

oak cabinets, slate chalkboards, and maple floors were in the classrooms. Large double-hung windows provided an abundance of natural light. The building structures were brick bearing walls with concrete and steel floor framing. Interior partitions were hollow clay tiles covered with Portland cement plaster. Everything was up to date in Boston, and the city was building schools to last another century.

Boston is now one of many urban areas that is educating children in both new and old buildings. With thoughtfulness and purpose, this city created its schools throughout the century. With planning, talent, ingenuity — and some luck — it produced school buildings that have been used and enjoyed by generations of diverse people. As the city embarks on a major building program, rediscovering and preserving these treasures will remind us of our obligation to continue this legacy of excellence in public buildings.

Doris Cole FAIA is president of Cole and Goyette, Architects and Planners Inc. in Cambridge. She and Nick Wheeler are co-authors of a forthcoming book on the architecture of the Boston public schools.

Cole will present "School Treasures" at the BSA's annual Eleanor Raymond Lecture at the Boston Public Library on April 26, 2000.



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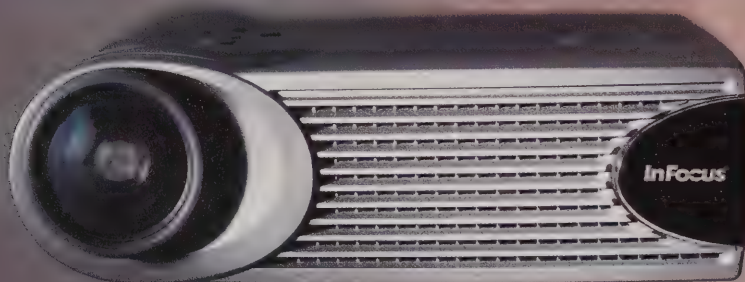
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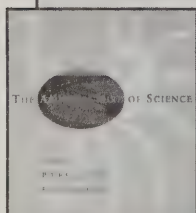
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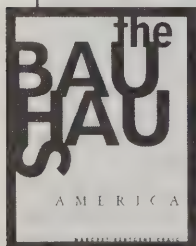
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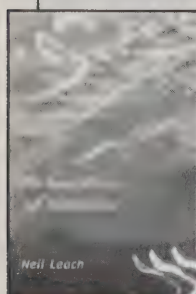
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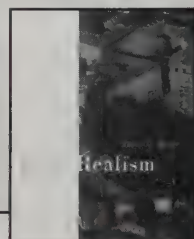
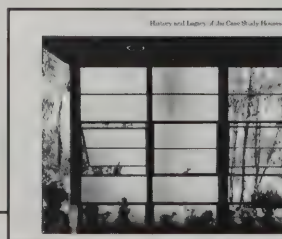
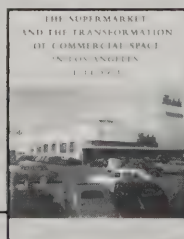
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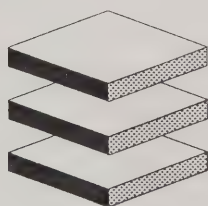
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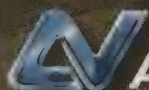
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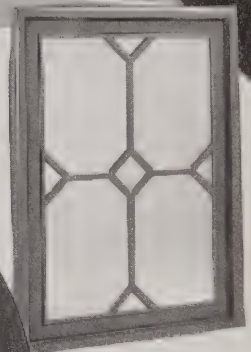
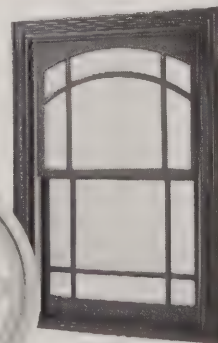
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# Unconventional Design

Rafael Viñoly FAIA talks with  
Andrea Leers FAIA

Rafael Viñoly FAIA is a principal of Rafael Viñoly Architects in New York.



Andrea Leers FAIA is a principal of Leers Weinzapfel Associates in Boston.



The new Boston convention center will be built on one of the largest parcels in the seaport; by its mere presence it will influence the future of the entire district.

But mere presence isn't enough. The city and the design community have enormous expectations for this building. At stake are a host of formidable planning and urban design concerns such as scale, massing, vehicular circulation, and pedestrian access; social and political tensions in the adjacent South Boston neighborhood; and the desire for a signature building that will not only draw thousands of bauble-buying conventioners, but that will also foster a new level of design innovation and excellence in the seaport area.

The architect for the Boston Convention and Exhibition Center is HNTB/Rafael Viñoly, a joint venture of HNTB Architecture of Boston and Rafael Viñoly Architects of New York. Despite an impressive body of international work, Viñoly is unknown to many Bostonians. He talked recently with Andrea Leers FAIA about his early career in Argentina, the recent success of his Tokyo Forum — a convention center and cultural complex — and his aspirations for the seaport project.



David L. Lawrence Convention Center, Pittsburgh

rendering: Rafael Viñoly Architects

**Leers** I became aware of your work in the late 1970s, when your book in Buenos Aires was published. Perhaps you could say something about that early part of your career in Argentina.

**Viñoly** I started when I was very young; the Spanish system of education is very different from the American or the Anglo-Saxon one. You have to make a decision pretty early on, when you're only 18 years old, about what you're going to do professionally. My first introduction to the field was through my mother, who was a student of architecture before becoming a mathematician.



I was extremely lucky from the beginning, because the first thing I did when I entered school was to win a competition for one of the school's buildings. And we built it. I started working immediately after that, around the time of the military intervention. Eventually I joined a partnership, and we started doing competitions, which was the typical way of getting important public work. That was the beginning, and it grew into work that was connected to the university. Until the military took over the school. And then all our dreams about the intellectual work at the school were completely shattered.

**Leers** What year was that?

**Viñoly** This was in '73, '74. I decided to start an alternative school so we could actually keep some of that work going. And we formed a school that was an amazing success for several years. It's still remembered.

**Leers** I have heard that you were a very serious musician. Did that precede your interest in architecture?

**Viñoly** Very much so. I started studying music when I was very young. My father was the head of the national opera theater in Uruguay. That's the reason we moved to Argentina — he went there to work at the opera theater [in Buenos Aires]. Later he got involved in theater and movies. I always had an inclination for music. I went into architecture after what you would call a case study of vocational crisis. I had finished a series of piano performances which I had worked on for many years, and that was exactly the moment when I had to decide if I would study architecture or enter music school.

**Leers** You enjoyed phenomenal success early on in Buenos Aires. What prompted you to come to this country?

**Viñoly** It was a series of things. The most important one was the fact that I was working in social and cultural conditions that were not just repressive, but incredibly dictatorial. It is something that you don't really focus on until you have some kind of a moment of objectivity. And despite what people think, that is a very difficult psychological process to go through. I presume this is exactly what happened to most Germans in the late '30s. Unless you're really attentive, you don't know how much you're getting into. Even if you're doing nothing, just living in that environment is a form of collaboration. Moving was a completely ethical decision on our part. There was no other obvious reason to do it, given the kind of life I was living. I had finished an enormous amount of work, the kinds of things that any architect would love to do.

What actually prompted the move was a combination of things. Just to give you an example: It was normal that the security forces would walk into your house and do whatever they wanted to. One day I was talking to a person who worked in our house, and he told me that, the day before, some people had come in and looked at the books in our library, and afterwards he had decided that there were some books that were not safe to have. He was actually packaging

these books and putting them into plastic bags and digging a hole for them in the garden. I found it totally logical and I helped him do it. And then I found myself saying, Wait a second, this is really not quite right. It took me literally less than two weeks to leave after that. We had a house and family and kids and work and the whole thing.

We had a friend, an American rabbi, who died a couple of years ago. A fabulous person. He was a representative of Amnesty International and showed me the documents that they collected to explain the whole situation of the repression. And I saw in those documents the actual stories about how people were killed — people who were my friends, people I had worked with at the university. People who you think have gone off somewhere, but you never know exactly what happened to them. Our friend also gave me a book that had a series of letters that Bruno Walter wrote to Mahler in '34, '36. He was a young conductor working at the Berlin Philharmonic. He wrote that he was having an amazing time, he had never had the chance to conduct such a glorious orchestra, things were great, but that there was something strange: "People tell me that there is something awful happening, but I don't quite see it." It's an interesting series of letters, because it's all about this process of understanding your relationship with a political context.

**Leers** I've always thought, because I knew that you had a substantial body of work before you left, that the experience of leaving must have been a profound one. A lot of other people who came from Buenos Aires at that time were still in the academic world and could transport their scholarship more readily. It must have taken a great deal of conviction and courage to leave a substantial practice.

**Viñoly** And gigantic arrogance. But I knew that if I didn't do it at that point I would probably never do it. I was 32.

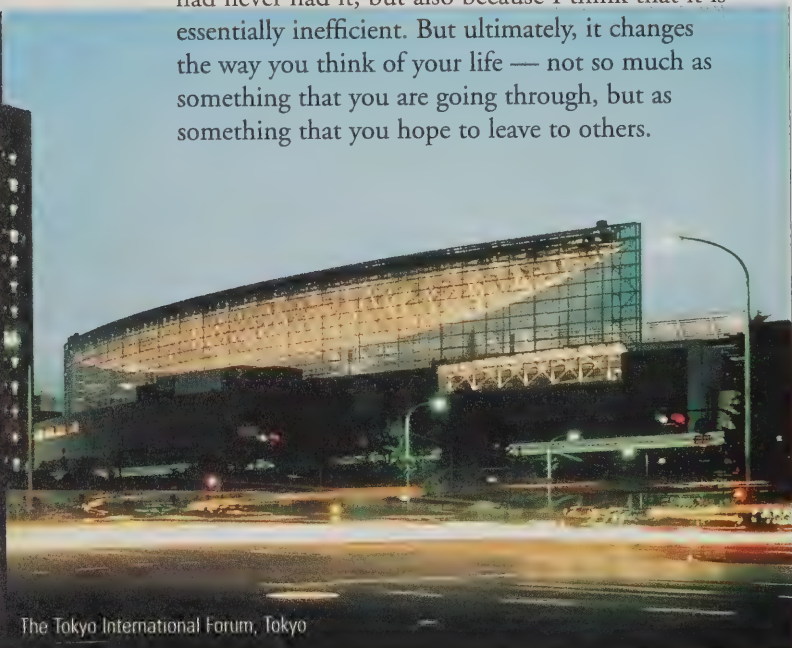
**Leers** In those formative years, what were the real influences on you?

**Viñoly** Argentina during the '60s and early '70s was extraordinarily exciting — Buenos Aires had an incredibly interesting intellectual life. But you never felt that you had a tradition behind you. It was not the same as working in Mexico, or in Brazil for that matter. You did not have a culture to contribute to. It's a place in which the ruling class was culturally dependent on Europe. The forefathers of Argentina were people who wanted to be French. And so our own cultural and institutional history was never fully formed. And that's the reason why this incredible phenomenon of the Fascist pseudo-social movement that started with Perón was so fascinating: It was completely authentic.

**Leers** Your work stands out by virtue of the fact that you are interested in large structures and the technology that makes them possible as an aesthetic undertaking. Is that what drew you to New York eventually? Did those kinds of projects seem to be more available here?



**Viñoly** No, it really had nothing to do with scale in itself. If anything, it had much more to do with what was an unanswered series of questions. I perceived that it was a special moment — like painters at the turn of the century who had to go to Paris. If you really think you understand Colin Rowe, why don't you go talk to him? Which is what I did. And he wasn't in London or Oxford; he was in New York. I never liked Europe very much — too old, too difficult, too stuffy. The other realization, which came later and was actually more formative, was the significance of the process of organized political involvement. I was very cynical about the mechanism of democracy, not just because we had never had it, but also because I think that it is essentially inefficient. But ultimately, it changes the way you think of your life — not so much as something that you are going through, but as something that you hope to leave to others.



The Tokyo International Forum, Tokyo

photo: Kawasumi

**Leers** That's a feeling that I think is shared by many people who come and make their lives here. Let's jump forward a bit to the most astonishing undertaking that you've had to date — winning the Tokyo Forum competition in 1990. How did that change the way you thought about things?

**Viñoly** It was the beginning of a series of unforgettable experiences over a period of seven years in which I really had more fun than one is allowed to have. I worked like a dog, but it was like a championship game — a situation in which you don't think of anything other than how to do it right.

**Leers** I saw it while it was under construction and then visited the completed building for the first time this summer. Knowing the city of Tokyo reasonably well, I understand that it really is an extraordinary event in the city. The glass hall is astonishing — there's no space like it. And the real gift to the city is the public park that runs through it.

**Viñoly** The one thing that totally amazes me is the fact that the pictures do not show you what the building is. Parts of the building are simplistic and diagrammatic, but they merge into a different reality. It has a level of order which is to me the best thing about it. That's something that I was sure from the beginning was needed, but I couldn't actually articulate it. To tell you the truth, a month before the presentation, every single person in the office who was working on the project — and it was a very large team for the competition — was pushing for exactly the negative of this project. A totally different organization. Everybody thought that this was too direct. I was so conflicted; everybody was pushing in one direction. Finally, with just enough time to finish the drawings, I went back to this scheme. It was the first time that I actually trusted my instincts. But the moment I did that, I knew that it would play with scale in a way that was going to dilute that simple reading. It is a building — and this is the big mistake of every single photographer who has gone there — that you don't necessarily have to see holistically.

**Leers** While it was under construction, I wandered around that part of the city looking for it. And I suddenly found myself on the outside wall where the auditoriums are, and I *knew* I was there. I suddenly had the sense of a, shall we say, European notion of urbanism. There was a street wall that was easy, natural, and inevitable. And I felt the same on the other side of the complex, where the pure geometric form follows the curve of the railroad. It was as though the best of our western urban traditions were being brought to a context which is struggling to find its own sense of urbanism. It's an extraordinarily rich response to both a western and Japanese sense of place. And now, of course, it's completely occupied. People love it — walking around, sitting in it, coming to see it. It has a sense of movement through it, which is very characteristic of Japanese public space.

**Viñoly** It's the dating capital of Japan.

**Leers** So I've heard. You had never done anything quite like the Forum, yet it seems to me that all your projects — I'm thinking especially of the Bronx courthouses and the Lehman College athletic facility — represent the artistic potential of technology, especially in the expression of large spaces.

**Viñoly** Some other people have appropriated this notion of technology, especially the English "high tech" architects. More than anything, that's an ethical posture. Because they're English, ethics becomes in itself a manifesto and a demonstration of moral superiority and all those other things that the Brits are



so keen on. I really never cared very much about being positioned in that repertoire. That's probably due to ignorance — it's not really very intellectual. It's simply that I don't know how to put a building together other than by putting it together. It's through putting a building together that something happens. I try to be sensitive to the logic of my own process, which requires a level of self-criticism. I recognize when I'm doing something that isn't intelligent; I recognize when I'm doing something that is re-interpretive or derivative or something I used before. But I don't have a critical posture beyond those kinds of checking points.

**Leers** Celebrating technology for its own sake is very much the focus of British and even French work of this moment. But your work is not about the celebration of the technology, so much as the easy and joyful use of it to create places and spatial experience. You're working now on another large project, the new Boston convention center. What distinguishes the Boston context for you?

**Viñoly** Boston was the first city in which I lived in America. I was here for a full semester. It's an amazing memory, because it's almost as if I had a real past in the city, which of course I don't. But that has tinted my perception, which is also influenced by all the warnings about the difficulty of working here — the extraordinary level of control and conservatism, if you will. The site is in a heated location, both politically and socially, but it seems to have created a certain kind of space for itself that I think is remarkably positive. The things that people think are important about a project of this magnitude — the design of the face of it, or the public rooms, or even the large spaces — are not really as important as developing a strategy for a connection with the waterfront. The building is grounded on two major ideas, which are basically site planning and circulation, both vehicular as well as public-access circulation. I think we've found a solution that is clever in terms of the building type. A convention center is always conceived as a structure that has a public face and a service face, and more often than not it is practically impossible to articulate spatially the exhibit area, because it's so infinite. Our solution attempts to change these two perceptions. I do not believe that in a place like this you can actually have a service edge. We've taken advantage of the fact that this site essentially has two levels of access. It is a very compact building, both for budget reasons and for urban design reasons.

**Leers** There's not much on the site now — there is an infrastructure context, but not much of the original seaport for which it was constructed. What were your assumptions or hopes for the setting around the building, the area between it and the waterfront?

**Viñoly** My assumptions were pretty much supported by the studies that were already ongoing when we first went to the site. There is a goal of density and circulation and public connection to the waterfront, which I fully support. Now that I know the seaport a little better, I believe that it has the potential of doing something with two opposites — the two opposites being the fabric of South Boston and the high-rise component of downtown Boston. These are the two ends of a scale of potential visions of how you can extend Boston. The first reaction that any of us would have is to imagine that these two visions should each contribute a little bit of this and a little bit of that. I think that probably the right approach is that it shouldn't be a little bit of anything.

**Leers** You're posing the intriguing possibility that there's a third distinct entity — a third scale, a third presence.

**Viñoly** Yes, and it's not just a question of texture, but a question of its relationship to its peculiar geographic context.

**Leers** In fact, historically, the landfill was created for a third purpose. It was neither the residential fabric nor was it the urban commercial scale of the downtown. It was a third dimension in the city, created for the shipping function with its warehouses.

**Viñoly** And now, if you really let the forces play, you have enough of a mass there to create a district which is as important as the downtown and yet has nothing to do with it. It's certainly not an industrial site any more. But it's a great field that can actually become a unifying field where some other things could happen. And that's the reason I think this building is so critical. If it looks like a convention center, then it's not doing its job. It has to be far more outgoing and assertive than I think a mere decorated box can actually be. There is a gigantic infrastructure below this building. By connecting to it through multilevels, you can develop an extraordinary building form.

**Leers** And in fact, that is essence of the Tokyo Forum — a multilevel experience that extends both down into the ground and above the ground.

**Viñoly** My interest in that kind of experience may be the reason why I've tried to become more educated about the Central Artery. If this enormous amount of money is being put underground simply because people couldn't actually live with the results of that site, then you are essentially breaking ground in the relationship between public investment and urban culture. There's no other place in the world that is spending this money just for looks, right? That is nothing to be ashamed of; quite the opposite. It's going to be very exciting, in fact. Change is inevitable, and there are some consequences of change that are totally unstoppable. Renzo Piano says that there is not much future in the past. He's right. It just takes a little time to realize that.



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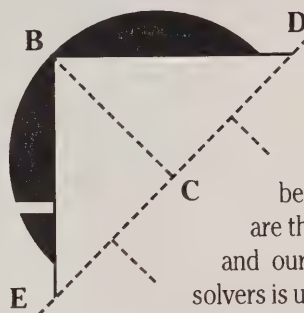
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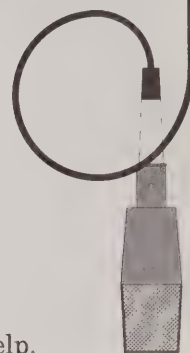
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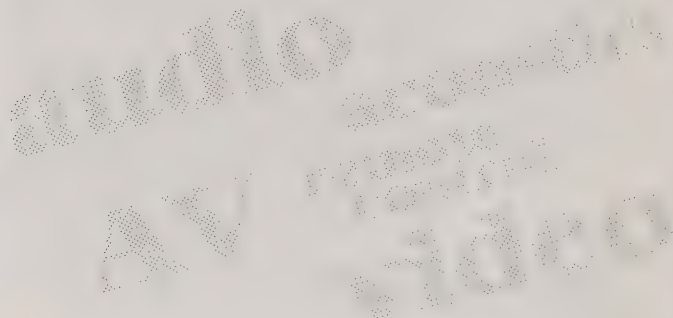
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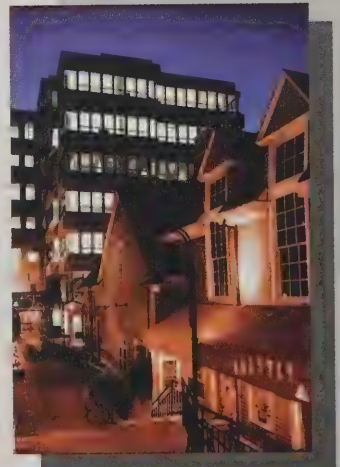
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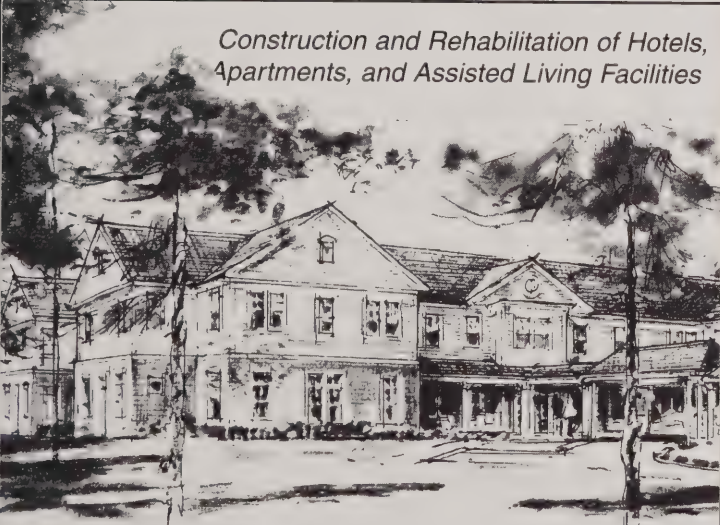
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**Boston's super-heated real-estate market** has generated scores of development proposals, most of them targeted for downtown locations. The 70 projects currently proposed or in the pipeline have provoked alarm in the city's neighborhoods. Many residents feel overwhelmed by the size of the proposals and their perceived impact, and they are vigorously voicing their concerns. But neighborhood involvement in the development discussion is a sign of Boston's success as a vibrant city, not a frustrating symptom of a lack of a "can-do" attitude.

In the last two decades, Boston's competitive niche — from a physical perspective — has become its walkable and human-sized scale. Guidebooks and newspapers tout the city's "moderate skyline" and "village charm" as qualities that visitors love. For residents, Boston offers an amenity possessed by only a handful of large American cities: thriving downtown neighborhoods where workplaces in the financial district are within walking distance, and a sense of community has been preserved in the midst of the urban hurly-burly. This is a valuable characteristic which deserves to be protected.

But Boston's intimacy is a function of its unusual geography. Its residents are keenly aware that over-development, hastily approved to catch the wave of a feverish real-estate cycle, will be unhealthy for the future livability of districts where residents must coexist with workers, shoppers and tourists. For that reason, community groups have been speaking forcefully about the dangers inherent in a building boom. They are not advocating a moratorium on development — responsible neighborhood organizations, which the city has in abundance, support reasonable choices. But they are asking some tough questions which deserve answers.

The hardest question has turned out to be the management of transportation infrastructure. It is difficult to see how Boston's streets will accommodate 30,000 new cars lured into the city by the parking facilities that accompany many of the development projects in planning, or already under review at the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA). The neighborhoods believe the only solution is an improved transit system. It is irresponsible to first build millions

# Two Views

## When good things happen to bad projects:

## The neighborhood review process

by Fred Mauet



photo: Anne C. Swanson

of square feet of development and then ask if there is a coherent strategy to serve the transportation needs of a denser city.

Although neighborhood groups are asking hard questions, they are certainly not controlling the development agenda. On the contrary — the new developer-friendly Article 80 of the Boston Zoning Code has speeded up BRA review immeasurably. We need to remember the lessons of the past, when residents who resisted projects were roundly criticized as "anti-progress." Decades later, we are thankful that stalwart citizens resisted highrises on the Commonwealth Avenue mall, a new expressway in the Southwest Corridor, and a tower plunging the Public Garden into perpetual shadow. Instead, the city is the proud possessor of a preserved jewel of the Emerald Necklace, a stunning "ribbon park," and the respectfully designed Heritage on the Garden complex — all victories of stubborn advocates who sailed against the prevailing development winds of their day.

This isn't to say that new building shouldn't happen in Boston. This city is deservedly a showcase of urban living, which merits the attention of developers who understand its history. The neighborhoods must be encouraged to participate in decision-making regarding the city's future if we are to have a semblance of serious discussion that moves out of developers' conference rooms. We are a society that works best with a healthy system of checks and balances. If neighborhood advocates didn't exist, they would have to be invented. ■■■■

**Fred Mauet**

**is the former chairman  
of the Neighborhood  
Association  
of the Back Bay.**



# When bad things happen to good projects: The neighborhood review process

by Matthew J. Kiefer



**Matthew J. Kiefer** is a Boston real-estate attorney. He teaches a course at the Harvard Graduate School of Design on the development-approval process.

**In a participatory democracy**, certain ideas seem unassailable — for instance, the notion that those most affected by planning and development decisions should participate in making them. I live two houses away from the Southwest Corridor — the proposed route of a highway stopped by citizen opposition and replaced by a relocated transit line and a linear park stretching from Back Bay Station to Forest Hills. Commuting on the Orange Line, I am daily reminded of the power of non-professional citizens to bring about more enlightened planning decisions.

But the distinguished progressive lineage of citizen advocacy makes it particularly unfortunate that the community review process has become so reactionary. Cities — especially healthy cities like Boston — are dynamic places, changing constantly to accommodate emerging industries, new residents, growing families, and new shopping patterns. To remain healthy, cities must embrace this change and shape it to meet their needs. Citizen advocacy can play a crucial role in shaping a development by providing constructive criticism from those most familiar with the specific locale. Yet today's neighborhood activists often abdicate this responsibility, choosing instead to impugn the developer's motives and oppose the very existence of the development proposal for no clear reason other than that it will alter the *status quo*. Rather than framing the debate in terms of what changes would make a project acceptable, neighbors simply try to stop the project or change it in ways which will clearly render it infeasible (which amounts to the same thing).

Opposition is often reflexive and parochial: The development will block my view or shadow my garden or compete with my store or increase my rent. Opponents do not trust the proponent's planning, traffic, and design professionals, who are generally making a good faith effort to address neighborhood concerns and whose credibility and livelihood depend on their integrity and accuracy. Opponents equally distrust public-sector planning professionals, undermining their ability to mediate controversies. This distrust is anachronistic at a time when planners and project consultants are more likely to embrace the ideas of Jane Jacobs than those of Robert Moses.

This reflexive anti-development sentiment often has perverse effects. Certainly, not all developers are civic-minded, but their self-interest usually leads them to seek expeditious compromises so that their projects can proceed. But time is wasted fighting development proposals that will ultimately go forward anyway — time and effort which could be spent improving them. (Based on the time value of money, there is often an inverse relationship between the length of permit delay and a developer's willingness to provide community benefits.) Worse yet, responsible developers find the process too difficult, leaving the field open for the more hard-nosed.

Neighborhood activists could be more effective in shaping development decisions if they kept an open mind about the effects of a development proposal until the proponents had an opportunity to present their case. Although difficult, activists would also do well to weigh their personal concerns about a development with the larger interests of the neighborhood and the city, balancing the impacts which every project has against the benefits the project will provide.

Though less cathartic, constructive criticism is much more effective than implacable opposition. Change happens. Activists could save their fire (and their credibility) by opposing only the rare projects that cannot be fixed.



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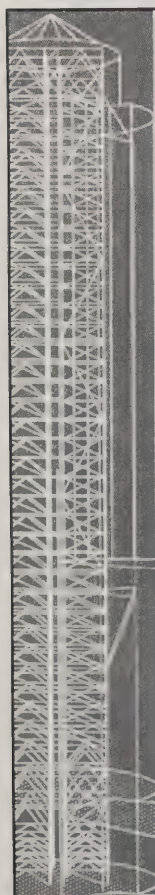


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# Covering the Issues

Periodical roundup  
by Gretchen Schneider



**Gigantomania...** We criticize it but can't stop building it: What's going on? Seems the latest chapter in the sprawl critique is against McMansionization, a/k/a Starter Castles. Apparently the American Dream has surpassed the stationwagon-two-kids-

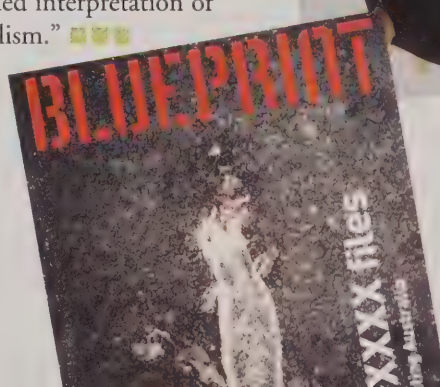
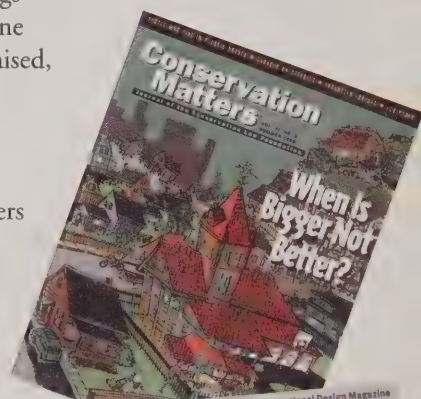
house-and-lawn-in-the-'burbs and transformed into a "more! more! MORE!" nightmare. Or perhaps it's the same dream, just on steroids: Skip the Joneses, on to the Rockefellers. Both *Conservation Matters* (published by the Conservation Law Foundation) and *Utne Reader* devote recent issues to the rising trend of razing a perfectly good existing house and replacing it with a new one several times larger. The cover of the Summer issue of *Conservation Matters* asks, "When Is Bigger Not Better?" focusing primarily on our region. October's *Utne Reader*, under the banner "Surreal Estate: Have We Gone Shelter Crazy?" talks more of the national trend. In varying degrees, eight articles here lament the loss of "less is more." A mix of original and reprinted texts, these liberal mags certainly showcase a liberal bias, but does anyone defend this stuff? As the call for regulation is raised, no doubt this issue will emerge on Gore's anti-sprawl Livability Agenda — or at least provide fodder for town meetings.

**Design Rules (verb and noun)...** October's *Fast Company* focuses on Big Issues including "Design Rules," proclaiming it's not just about decoration anymore. "[Design] is a critical component of how we communicate, collaborate, and compete....the trick for all businesspeople today is to learn those underlying rules — to think like designers." Editors Anna Muoio and Lucy McCauley asked 15 purveyors of design — from Terence Conran to Alex Krieger — for 15 seconds of insight. In a nutshell, good design's the perfect mix of common sense, functionality, whimsy, history, simplicity, truth, humanity, emotion, color, light, texture, beauty, elegance, respect, rigor, courage, clear goals, provocation, efficiency, economy, thoughtful process, and human theater. Sounds like my work...how about yours?

**No more ugly toothbrushes!...** Furthering the good-design-is-good-business theme is *I.D.* magazine's annual awards issue (July/August). The winners themselves are not as striking as the near limitless range of design applications represented. Case in point: the "graphics" category, which cites the revised FedEx forms, SOM's San Francisco Food Bank Donor Wall, and the book *Albert Frey: Houses 1+2*. Most akin to architecture is the "environments" category. Modest to magnificent, mostly urban, definitely urbane, the award-winners run the gamut from conventional buildings like KPF's Seoul Rodin Museum to urban design at San Francisco's Hallidie Plaza to Apple's Macworld tradeshow. Other categories recognize the new tongue-in-cheek Miller Lite cans ("packaging"), the sleek and sumptuous Audi TT Coupe ("consumer products"), Herman Miller's low-cost Reaction Task Chair ("furniture"), and the Hi & Dri Oral Isolation Device ("equipment"). As for that last one, let's just say that you'll long for it at your next visit to the dentist; look it up on your own.

**Think globally, design locally...** *Blueprint* offers another take on the global marketplace in its June issue. In "The New Vernacular," Gareth Williams asks, "In an age of globalized communications...can design still reflect local character?" He describes three current projects in Germany, France, and the Netherlands. No Ye Olde Trinkets or nostalgic "Main Street" pastiche here — these projects are innovative, forward-looking designs which incorporate local processes and craftsmanship, provide for a specific local need, or create and celebrate local industry. Though the projects featured are small-scale product and furniture designs, the question bears obvious implications for buildings. A much-needed interpretation of Frampton's "critical regionalism." ■■■■

Gretchen Schneider has recently moved from Boston to Lexington, KY, where she has joined the architecture faculty at the University of Kentucky.





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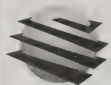
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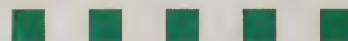
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## Books

# Design by Competition

## Making Design Competitions Work

Jack L. Nasar  
Cambridge University Press, 1999

Reviewed by Jeffrey Stein AIA

Jeffrey Stein AIA teaches in the department of architecture at Wentworth Institute of Technology in Boston and serves on the BSA board of directors as its commissioner of education.



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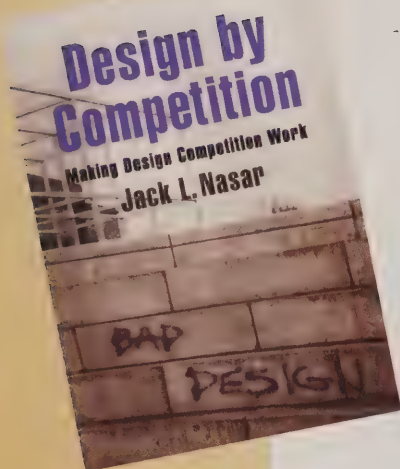
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**"Has there ever been** another place on earth where so many people of wealth and power have paid for and put up with so much architecture they detested as within these blessed borders today?"

These words appear at the very beginning of Jack Nasar's new book on design competitions. If you recognize them as part of Tom Wolfe's *From Bauhaus to Our House*, you know to prepare yourself. The profession of architecture is in for a rough time of it in this extensive study of how bad buildings win design competitions. Focusing on the Wexner Center for the Visual Arts at Ohio State University, the book goes on to show how the majority of competition-winning buildings, though their designs may be praised by architects and critics, neither work for nor are well-liked by the public once they are built. But unlike Wolfe's earlier fable, this is not a subjective look at the profession from a distance. This is the work of an insider. Nasar is a professor of city and regional planning at Ohio State, a social scientist, and a fellow of the American Psychological Association who has performed some very thorough research on architecture competitions. His conclusion: Architecture can become a knowledge-based profession as opposed to a fine art (and haven't we been talking about this for some years now?). In this book he describes the way future design competitions — if we must have them — could help make that happen.

Nasar begins with a famous failure. The example of Peter Eisenman's Wexner Center, winner of a 1983 competition, may seem at first too easy a target. "My work is not about convenience — it is about art!" Eisenman says. But even with that as a preamble, the story of this building is a frightening one. Initially budgeted at \$16 million, the real

construction cost of the Wexner was nearly three times that amount (\$46 million). Upon completion, the university immediately spent an additional \$1 million to fix roof leaks. Nearly \$10 million more was allocated just to correct lighting problems in the building. Continuing problems include acoustics, handicap access, floods, security, unusable furniture and library shelves (designed by the architect), and uncontrolled daylight (which has meant that the Center — an art museum — cannot meet insurance requirements). Entrances are hard to find; staff and visitors can't find their way around the building's contorted layout; the building's siting invites vandalism and crime; maintenance costs 35 percent more per square foot than at any other OSU buildings — new or old. Even HVAC costs are 37 percent above buildings elsewhere on campus. There's more, but you get the idea.

Well, so what? Eisenman never said the building was about those issues anyway. And besides, a building like Wexner, competition winner or not, is surely just an isolated case, isn't it? Not according to the hundreds of respondents — both architects and non-architects — the author interviewed while writing this book. So why do competitions fail? How does a jury actually select a scheme with apparently no understanding of the difficulties and costs that often follow? Nasar examines these questions in precise, readable prose and offers specific solutions.

To understand the public's negative reactions Nasar evaluated 90 competition-winning buildings on the basis of scientific guidelines about what people think and feel about places. While he does tell the stories of a few remarkable competition successes — from the first ever recorded, in Athens in 448 BC, to Maya Lin's 1981 Vietnam Memorial — Nasar also presents the detailed results of his studies: Competition winners are "flawed for the occupants and passersby who regularly experience them."

One difficulty comes from the distance most juries have from the real users of the building projects. In competitions there is no dialogue, no client contact. Thus what is arguably the most valuable phase of the design process — working with clients to determine their needs — is lost. Another difficulty stems from the fact that so many juries are made up of architects and others who consider themselves part of a theoretical *avant-garde*. Throughout the 20th century, many architects have believed architecture to be a tool of "progress." Led by Le Corbusier ("the public needs re-education") and even later by Philip Johnson ("architects need not take the vulgar public taste seriously"), the profession appears to many to have developed a serious case of

cultural elitism. You think the public could have been re-educated to appreciate the award-winning Pruitt-Igoe? Think again. The cultural arrogance we have accepted as our profession's birthright is no longer sustainable. Examples in *Design by Competition* show that we have developed a language that often fails to communicate meaning to a larger public. And it is difficult to continue to luxuriate in the fading glamour of that situation when the public stoops to make real demands of our buildings by living and working in them.

Nasar believes that "the process of creating buildings should lead to solutions that benefit the public — durable solutions that work for and delight the client, users, and the public." This calls for a new understanding of design, not as theory or even an aesthetic, but as "the integration of knowledge." (Note that the recent Boyer-Mitgang/Carnegie Foundation report describes architectural education in the same language.) And this, Nasar says, can be done by more careful programming, jury selection, in-depth site visits for the jury, and by managing the competition process by incorporating information gathered through PJE (Pre-Jury Evaluation) and POE (Post-Occupancy Evaluation).

PJE is a research-based survey that measures public response to specific aspects of a building, such as its coherence, order, livable space, and meaning. Nasar shows these are issues which the public holds important. They are also issues which have little to do with art or stylistic appearance, and this indicates a wide gulf between the way many architects view their work and how the public experiences it. Nasar has tested the PJE process and found that it did, in fact, accurately predict public reaction to a competition-winning building. POE allows the client to evaluate the building and the competition process by measuring actual performance relative to program, jury criteria and other dimensions. It is a method that can create a knowledge base to improve future projects. Until competition juries have access to pre-jury evaluations, as Nasar describes them, and to post-occupancy information gleaned from other buildings, their deliberations will likely continue to be out of touch with most people — the users of our buildings.

Stanford Anderson, head of MIT's department of architecture, once gave a remarkable standard for judging architecture, for which he will forever be remembered: "Does it expand human possibility?" Jack Nasar, trying to be helpful, puts forth a set of scientific steps that could show whether a building will do this or not. Let's watch what happens as the ideas explored in this book become part of our very public profession's public policy.



## Yale University: The Campus Guide

By Patrick L. Pinnell

Princeton Architectural Press,  
1999

Reviewed by William Morgan

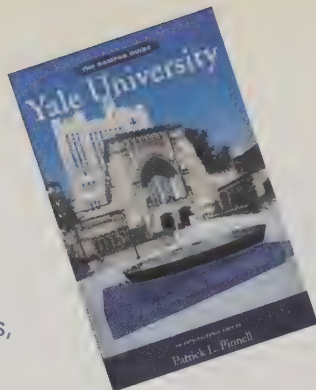
The American college campus is one of this country's great artistic contributions — and a perennial vision of utopia. It is impossible to separate academic reputation from architectural presence: Imagine the University of Virginia without Thomas Jefferson's Lawn, Princeton or Yale without their Gothic towers, or Harvard without its Wrenaissance ambiance.

Despite the importance of the collegiate ideal, the literature on the subject is regrettably sparse. There have been occasional studies, but Princeton Architectural Press's new series will do much to enrich our understanding of this particular architectural genre. (Yale follows Virginia; Harvard and MIT are forthcoming.)

*Yale University* is less of a pocket guide (the individual tour maps are totally inadequate, and there is no plan of the entire campus) than a conveniently accessible history. The book is beautifully produced, with photographs and text by Patrick Pinnell, a Yale graduate and Hartford architect. Pinnell's photographs are absolutely stunning, although there are far too few of them, alas; no building gets more than one view, some none at all. His writing is informed, often humorous, and sometimes poetic.

It seems unlikely that anyone buying this guide will not already know something of Yale, but there are many surprises.

Yale has garnered praise for commissioning so many works by major architects since World War II. But the real stars of the Yale building story are not Paul Rudolph's battered warrior of Brutalism (the Art & Architecture building), Gordon Bunschaft's un-campy kitsch



(the Beinecke Library), or even Kahn's seminal museums. In his balanced overall treatment of the entire campus, Pinnell has rehabilitated the works of long-ignored giants like John Russell Pope, James Gamble Rogers, and Charles Klauder, all of whom produced masterpieces for Yale.

Sir Nikolaus Pevsner's canonical *Buildings of England* series created an appreciation of the 19th century largely because he did not know he wasn't supposed to praise unfashionable Victorian architecture. In a similar fashion, Pinnell lets the reader see how accomplished Yale's Gothicists and Neo-Georgians were despite their half century of obscurity.

As a contemporary of Mies' glass skyscraper design for Berlin and Gropius' De Stijl composition for the Chicago Tribune, Rogers' 216-foot-high Harkness Tower has long been the subject of Modernist scorn, sneered at as a romantic stage set. Yet Pinnell reminds us how creative, modern, and downright good the so-called eclectics were. Even the Victorians, like Russell Sturgis, Charles Coolidge Haight, and J. Cleaveland Cady come to life in Pinnell's words and pictures.

Eero Saarinen's Stiles and Morse colleges of the early 1960s are successful because he understood the nature of Gothic Yale — its drama, mastery of materials, and self-assurance. Intentionally or otherwise, this guide to the whole range of Yale's architectural patrimony makes the New Haven designs of Edward Larrabee Barnes, Marcel Breuer, and Frank Gehry look like greasy kid stuff.

William Morgan is professor of architecture at Roger Williams University and is the author of *Collegiate Gothic*. His monograph on Heikkinen+Komonen is forthcoming from Monacelli Press.

## A House for My Mother: Architects Build for their Families

by Beth Dunlop  
Princeton Architectural Press,  
1999

Reviewed by Jim Moore



Collages of crayon and finger paint hung on the refrigerator evoke emotions familiar to us all: love, pride, perhaps even the need for approval. In *A House for My Mother*, Beth Dunlop presents the ultimate in refrigerator art — designing a house for one's parents. Few commissions provide such a revealing view into the psyche of an architect. The traditional role of the architect has been that of fiduciary, representing the client without conflict of interest. But in this collision of id and ego, the architect is at once designer and client, historian and history.

In this collection of 12 projects by designers such as Charles Gwathmey, Laurinda Spear, and Robert Venturi, Dunlop offers examples of the magic that can evolve from this most intimate situation. The introduction tantalizes the reader with tales of struggles, conflicts, and drama worthy of a Frank Lloyd Wright or Eileen Gray. The case-study descriptions, however, merely flirt with the potentially volatile processes of creation, focusing instead on nostalgic recollections and lengthy descriptions of layouts.

The reader is left to judge the environments through the juxtaposition of family snapshots with professional photographs of

deserted "homes." Despite this frustration, the book is accessible and attractive to both lay readers and the architectural community. Every reader can enjoy the commentary on the architect/family relationship, while the architectural community will appreciate the architectural, aesthetic, and social lineages that Dunlop traces through the book.

The selection of projects, despite bordering on the cliquish, presents an interesting array of geographic, social, economic, and aesthetic conditions. Projects range from the rigorously polemic — such as those by Gwathmey and Venturi — to the surprisingly sentimental — such as that by Richard Meier. Dunlop looks at projects that are timeless but not faceless, addressing the common quest for meaning — in family, architecture, and place.

The former architecture critic of the *Miami Herald*, Dunlop combines journalistic insight with Rockwellian sentiment. *A House for My Mother* is an original and entertaining peek into the personal and creative lives of designers whose work once hung on Mom's refrigerator and now hangs on the decision of where to put Mom's refrigerator. ■ ■ ■

Jim Moore is a designer at Perry Dean Rogers & Partners: Architects in Boston. He recently completed a redesign of his parents' house in Lenox, MA, and is working on a book about artificial and natural light in Finnish architecture.



## Ranches, Rowhouses, and Railroad Flats

by Christine Hunter

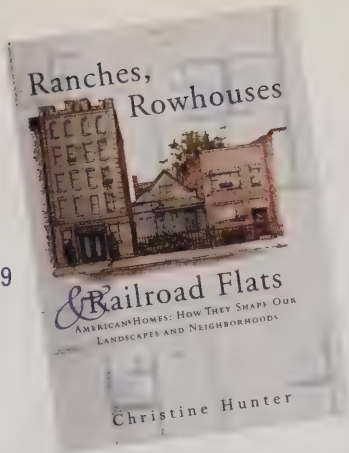
W. W. Norton & Company, 1999

Reviewed by Carol Burns AIA

If you've never thought much about the residential environment, this book offers great insights. The subtitle, "American Homes: How They Shape Our Landscapes and Neighborhoods," accurately describes the book's broad focus—helping readers look more carefully at homes and neighborhoods which are often so familiar that they are barely seen.

An overview of this country's residential landscape, the book has three main parts. The first chapters provide a basic background, describing fundamental requirements for human dwellings and the evolution of spatial and legal standards for American dwellings. The main section describes three fundamental house forms: freestanding houses, attached houses, and apartments. The book closes with a discussion of neighborhoods—how they are made, transformed, and perceived.

The author is an architect who works with elementary and secondary-school students and teachers; this background provides an insight to the book's distinctive qualities. *Ranches, Rowhouses, and Railroad Flats* addresses an important subject in a manner that is basic though not at all simplistic, synthesizing extensive material with admirable comprehension. Hunter focuses on the physical dimensions of houses but also addresses the institutional and regulatory context in which they have been built, including historical changes in building and transportation technologies, mortgage financing, building codes, and zoning law. The book includes perceptive thumbnail sketches on topics including manufactured housing, preservation and adaptive reuse, public housing, the work-to-home journey, and opportunities for improving neighborhood design.



Readers accustomed to either architectural polemics (that provoke by making unsubstantiated claims) or academic research (that closely constructs sets of claims and evidence) might feel that much of this book is bland or irrefutable. However, the author holds a set of convictions, noting that most architectural writing addresses a comparatively small audience—mainly professionals—and that its aesthetic viewpoint effectively dismisses "most of what gets built." She is a member of a growing group of professionals and educators focused on helping people see the built environment and understand that its form is not inevitable.

Even if you *have* thought about the built environment, this book offers great insights. For book collectors and those with an interest in the residential landscape, it belongs on a shelf with J.B. Jackson, Kenneth T. Jackson, and Amos Rapoport. Architects will find that it is both an enjoyable read and a comprehensive reminder of the important potential of American houses. Should you buy it? If you don't buy one copy, you should consider buying two. It is a great book to give to anyone who wants to understand the forces that shape our houses and neighborhoods. ■■■

Carol Burns AIA is a principal of Taylor MacDougall Burns Architects in Boston. She directs the Harvard Institute of Affordable Housing and is a housing fellow at the Joint Center for Housing Studies.

## Writing for Design Professionals

by Stephen A. Kliment

W.W. Norton & Company, 1998

Reviewed by

Elizabeth S. Padjen FAIA

From his bully pulpit as the former editor of *Architectural Record*, Stephen Kliment FAIA frequently railed against the murky language and muddy writing that have infected architectural literature. Unlike some who are content to whine about life's irritations, Kliment decided to do something about it. The result is *Writing for Design Professionals*—a commonsense guide to clarity.

Poking fun at academic design language has become a parlor game of sorts among practicing architects, who trade the silliest contrivances with glee. But, as Kliment points out, the workaday world of architecture is not immune either. He offers this clunker as an example: "The undersigned and her collaborating team members undertake to implement the necessary contract documents for your secondary level educational facility in the requested time frame of 35 workweeks, with the understanding that in the eventuality of your adding programmatic elements...." (It's too dreadful to quote in its entirety.)

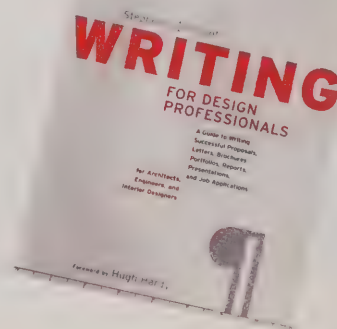
Kliment addresses the pervasiveness of the problem by organizing chapters around specific tasks: marketing correspondence, brochures, proposals, newsletters, project management, public speaking, academic writing, magazine articles, e-mail and Web sites. The text is full of samples—some invented for his purposes, others borrowed from actual correspondence—that make his point. "Write as you would talk," Kliment urges. Unfortunately, some architects—whose spoken language is every bit as inscrutable as their written—do exactly that. But Kliment gently points the way to clarity, offering

examples and corrections as well as general guidelines to good writing. His approach is neither condescending nor draconian; he understands the value of flexibility and informality, as in a letter by William Caudill to a potential client: "Availability? Say 'frog,' we'll jump."

Despite its title, *Writing for Design Professionals* is not confined to the craft of wordsmithing. Kliment offers practical information about the business of communication: structuring and distributing press releases; organizing award submittals and grant proposals; writing as a career. Eight pages of color plates offer examples of good graphics in various media, from postcards to newsletters and brochures.

Who should buy this book? The easy, if unrealistic, answer is "everybody." Design students certainly should, but they are unlikely to understand fully the value of communication skills in sustaining a career. Large and mid-size firms often already have access to skilled writers, although brown-bag lunch seminars based on this text are a welcome thought. But *Writing for Design Professionals* will be especially valuable to small firms and, in particular, young firms whose principals are still making the transition between academic language and the *patois* of the business world. Wondering how to write to a prospective client? How to structure a response to a Request for Proposals? Kliment is there, like a deskside consultant with a flat fee of \$36.50. Not a bad investment. ■■■

Elizabeth S. Padjen FAIA is editor of *ArchitectureBoston*.







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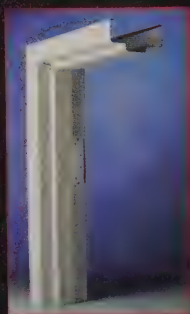
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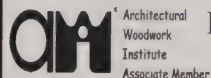
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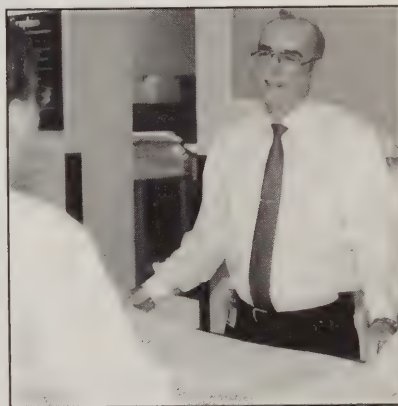
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### Web sites of note

#### Graham Foundation

[www.grahamfoundation.org](http://www.grahamfoundation.org)

Not genius enough for a MacArthur? Maybe the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts can help. Check out the grant application and the database of recent recipients, including project abstracts and the amounts awarded.

#### Bad Human Factors Designs

[www.baddesigns.com](http://www.baddesigns.com)

"A scrapbook of illustrated examples of things that are hard to use because they do not follow human factors principles." An entertaining site, filled with examples that are sadly familiar. Except maybe for the men's room mop sink that...well, never mind.

#### The Movie Palace Locator Map

[www.execpc.com/~hiawatha/mp/map.html](http://www.execpc.com/~hiawatha/mp/map.html)

We know you secretly love those cushy new seats and mega-cupholders at the local multiplex. But nothing beats the glamour of the old movie palaces. Click on the map to find local examples; links provide other resources for more information.

#### Virtual Portmeirion

[www.virtualportmeirion.com](http://www.virtualportmeirion.com)

This one brings new meaning to the word "virtual." Portmeirion is a private ersatz village in Wales, built from scratch earlier this century by Sir Clough Williams-Ellis. It later served as the set for the 1960s TV cult classic, "The Prisoner," in which the lead characters were surreptitiously monitored. Now you can tour the town electronically. There's a Ph.D. dissertation here somewhere.

#### The Live/Work Institute

[www.live-work.com](http://www.live-work.com)

The Live/Work Institute is a non-profit promoting "zero-commute housing." Includes basic concepts, examples of actual projects, and code information.

**WalkBoston** [www.walkboston.org](http://www.walkboston.org)

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# The Gropius House

photos: Courtesy of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities



**Some families** go hiking or bicycling together on the weekends. We visit houses. My husband, who is an architect, focuses on proportion, design, the way the house works with the landscape. Sometimes he sketches. Our children yawn. I stand in the various rooms and daydream.

The houses speak.

From the cliffs of Newport, the Breakers looks back at the palaces of Europe, sticks out its gilded tongue, and says, "Nyah-nyah."

The Roosevelt house at Hyde Park, with the two large richly furnished bedrooms belonging to FDR and his mother, flanking the tiny single-bedded white cell where Eleanor slept, whispers, "Get it?"

But it is the Gropius house in Lincoln that speaks to me most eloquently, and most seductively. The first time I went there it murmured in my ear: "You can have this. You can live this way."

I believed it; I was in my mid-20s. I went so far as to copy the desk Walter and Ise Gropius had in their study. Theirs was designed by Marcel Breuer; the one my husband and I made was just a couple of laminated lumberyard doors resting on filing cabinets. But the principle was the same: a single expanse of desktop where two people could sit and work side by side. I loved that it was both a desk and desks, singular and plural. Husband and wife, sitting together, quietly working on separate but equally fascinating projects. Looking back, I can see that setting up the desk was our version of "If you build it, they will come." If we could make our surroundings resemble the Gropius house — stripped down, intelligently conceived — then we would be able to work the way we imagined they had: confidently, productively, without distraction.

That was 15 years ago.

Going through the house again recently, I was startled by its boldness, the ruthlessness of its modesty. It refuses almost everything: mullions, moldings, mantels, gratuitous embellishment of any kind. It has the kind of spare, lean mid-century elegance that characterizes Balanchine's ballets. (I don't think it's a coincidence that both Gropius and Balanchine adored TV westerns — both men were invigorated by their adopted country. Gropius running New England clapboard vertically to create a siding for the Lincoln house reminds me of Balanchine choreographing to Sousa.)

The house embodies *le geste essentiel* — just enough to be right, with nothing excessive. That's not the same thing as minimalism. I once saw a magazine piece about an English architect's house, which was white and geometric and just plain empty. His wife was quoted as saying wistfully, "I admire his aesthetic, but I do miss my books...." The Gropius house is simple, but not spartan. It's designed for comfort, to suit two people who perfectly understand their own idiosyncratic definition of comfort. The essence of the house is in every detail: in the desk; in the stark white dining table beneath its pinpoint spotlight; in the long, low dressing table, with a mirror above and a mirror behind, so that Ise could see the back of her head when she was doing her hair.

On our most recent visit, the guide told us that the Gropiuses once gave a party to which each guest had to wear a metal hat. She opened the dressing-room closet to show us the one that Ise had designed for herself — a witty little scribble of punched steel, at once industrial and very feminine.

I stood looking at the hat, and the house said something that was almost the same, but also crucially different, from what I thought I'd heard at the age of 26: "You wish you could live this way."

And it's true.

I wish I had a clear and enduring sense of what matters and what doesn't. I wish I could be that good at my work. I wish my work and my life, and my husband's work and his life, could combine without a seam.

I want to be at that party.

Joan Wickersham is the author of *The Paper Anniversary*, a novel published by Viking.

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